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1941-1946



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Printed in Great Britain by Balding & Mansell Ltd., London and Wisbech

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CHAPTER I

TO WHAT PURPOSE?

IN the late spring of 1941, when the final victory of the Axis powers had been almost unaccountably retarded, a small convoy was steaming in the Arabian Sea. The ships lurched in the April swell, and many Indian soldiers to whom ships had been a story-teller's fancy were suffering that misery which the sea keeps ready for landsmen. Nobody could say where they were going. In the cases stacked in the holds the officers had uniforms suitable for the ordered life of Singapore, but the ships were headed, as even landsmen knew, to the north and west. As one of them passed along a sandy coast-line there were two men aboard, a British colonel and the oldest of the Sweepers, to whom the headlands were unhappily familiar; they had come this way a quarter of a century before.

It was in the newspapers before long that British and Indian troops had landed in Iraq. Iraq? To thousands in buses and tubes, glancing through the war news on their way to the factory, the Arabic name was puzzling. The Persians had found a new name for their country, but wasn't that Iran? Iraq? Was it something to do with the Air Force? But men with moustaches turning grey, who talked in a corner of a drill-hall before the evening Home Guard parade, knew something about Iraq. 'Mespot!' they said. So that was starting again! Heat like the opening of an oven door, the flies, the pack-mules, the mihailas; heat-stroke, dysentery: time had blurred the details, but they remembered Mesopotamia as a kind of delirium, a brown and yellow nightmare. And now another crowd, sons of their own perhaps, were to go through that.

History, indeed, was to repeat itself. Not with detailed fidelity. The glory of Wheeler's single-handed charge at Shu'aiba, the long agony of Kut: these were not to be re-enacted. This time it was a different army, differently equipped, and ultimately with still larger purposes. But the deserts had not changed, the heat had not grown less merciless. In these desolate and thirsty lands hundreds of thousands of Indian and British troops were destined to live for many months, and some to die. This, once again, was to be a test of British power to survive, to organize and labour, in conditions as disheartening as any the world could offer. Here, when the British Commonwealth faced alone the most destructive power in history, when German guns commanded Dover, when the spreading fires of war increased incessantly the need for men and material, an army was to be born, to remain and grow gigantic, hundreds of miles from any major battle. Soldiers hungry for a taste of

fighting, able commanders, experienced organizers; great engineers, skilled tradesmen, tireless labourers; trucks and cannon, timber and iron, machine tools, surgical instruments, dynamos; the whole, huge apparatus of modern war, the finest in men and material that the Commonwealth could create or discover, was to be poured out in the vast and empty lands between the Caspian and the Persian Gulf. Was this immense expenditure of labour and living wasted?

Men who have served in the Persia and Iraq Command have never talked loudly about their service; they leave the limelight to those on whom it falls. But they reveal sometimes a peculiar and elusive pride, like the pride of men who belong to a distinguished society. Is there any foundation for that pride? Have they, in fact, rendered to their countries or to the world any distinguished service? What, in the end, has been their achievement?

CHAPTER II

A BATTLEGROUND THROUGH FOUR MILLENNIA

IT was a friendly army, an army which honourably settled its bills; it was not an army of occupation. From Trondhjem to Marseilles there are millions who can tell with bitterness what an army of occupation is like: the swaggering officers, the insolent demands, secret police. Had Hitler's great strategic plan developed as he intended, Iraq would have experienced invasion by just such an army as that. The Union Jack which flew above a villa in Baghdad might well have been a swastika; except that a German Commander-in-Chief would probably have chosen for his headquarters a more impressive building, such as the Iranian Legation next door. For Iraq, an army of occupation would have been no new experience. For fundamentally the German plan was not original. In the several thousand years of her history, back almost to the time when half the present kingdom lay beneath the waters of the Persian Gulf, Iraq has known invasion again and again.

At first, the wars this country suffered were local. When the Persian Gulf began to recede, perhaps seven thousand years ago, tribes from the northern mountains of Persia journeyed southward to find living space in the land which the sea was leaving behind: land enriched by the soil which the Tigris and Euphrates brought down from the Turkish hills. Here, long before the beginning of recorded history, they built houses with swinging doors, made boats and fished, used vessels for eating and drinking, worshipped their gods. But the problem of scarcity existed even in the earliest times. Flocks grew; when pasture was insufficient the obvious solution was to use that of a neighbouring people. And the first written records of these lands tell of warfare between their Sumerian inhabitants and the Semitic Akkadians from the west. A thousand years pass, and the Sumerians as a nation have gone, giving place to the Semitic kingdom of Babylon, in the plain of South Iraq, and the kingdom of the Assyrians (a people of mixed Semitic origin) in the fertile hill country of the north. Again the story is one of struggle, of rebellious cities plundered, their inhabitants massacred or led into captivity. And now the wars had ceased to be an affair of battle between neighbouring tribes. Great military figures had emerged, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar; their armies swept into Syria and Palestine, meeting and sometimes conquering the armies of Israel and Judah; they penetrated southward into Egypt. It was no longer merely the quest for living space. For the splendour and luxury

of their cities, their ornate temples and vast processional boulevards, they wanted treasure and slaves. But as yet there were no conquerors with ambitions on the Hitlerian scale. The Hitlers were still to come.

If the country of Tigris and Euphrates had an 'outside position' in the world's land surface—a position, for instance, like that of Arabia—her history might well have been free from the burdens and brutalities of conquest. Tragically, Iraq lies at the very meeting-place between East and West. A European conqueror looks eastwards for fields to win new prestige, he thinks of the splendour of Persepolis, the wealth of India. A military genius from the hinterland of Asia looks covetously towards the commercial and artistic brilliance of the northern Mediterranean shore. To both the central problem is the same. There are as yet no Suez canal, no ships in which large armies can be carried and fed across great distances. The operation means movement by land, movement through that neck of earth which joins the land-mass of India to the Mediterranean coast. Northward of that neck there is the Caspian. At the south the Arabian Sea thrusts up one broken-knuckled finger, the Persian Gulf, to narrow the land passage. And it is narrowed again by mountains very formidable against the animals which, till the last few years, had to carry all an army's supplies.

This way, then, the great conquerors had to pass; and when all movement was limited by the power of men and animals it was a passage occupying many months. Somewhere the huge armies had to rest and re-equip; gather new fodder for their exhausted beasts; at some half-way stage a commander accustomed to the cultured life of Persepolis or Antioch must find quarters in which to live.

The first fertility of the Tigris delta had dwindled as, with centuries passing, the fierce sun baked the marshland into gypsum and sand. But successive rulers of that country would not yield tamely to the force of nature; the rivers still brought water from the northern snows, skilled engineers could capture it and divert it into man-made channels, turning the desert back into arable land. When mighty Babylon had become a ruin, as Ur had perished in the centuries before, a new metropolis arose at Seleucia; to give place, as generations passed, to the glories of Ctesiphon and of Haroun al-Rashid's Baghdad. For prestige, for the economic as well as the strategic needs of armies, the land of the two rivers remained the one to which every conqueror must come.

For a young café orator who dreamed of mastering the world these facts had special significance. The history which Adolf Hitler learnt from Dr. Leopold Poetsch (an admirable teacher, he said) may not have been comprehensive or profound. It is likely that he knew nothing of Hammurabi, the noblest of the ancient kings; Cyrus the conqueror of Babylon; Darius who wrote a *Mein Kampf* of his own on the rocks of Asia; Xerxes and Xenophon, Mithridates, Omar ibn Khattab, these

may have been little more than names to him. Hulagu, the Mongol emperor who spent two years preparing ordnance stores for the attack on Mesopotamia; Tamerlane, the greatest of the Mongols; Sulaiman the Magnificent who first brought cannon through the hills of Kurdistan: of these mere Asiatics the wayward student in the fortress of Landsberg had possibly never heard. But the Romans he knew. "Roman history," he said, "along general lines, is and will remain the best teacher, not only for our own times but also for the future." And like all Germans he professed a pious veneration for the culture of the Greeks. Surely, then, Alexander had a special place in the oddly assorted furniture of that steam-heated brain; surely Hitler followed, with dreaming envy, the young Macedonian's army as it fell upon Egypt, as it crossed the desert to the great rivers and to Babylon, and on to the Persian capitals, to Susa and Persepolis, to Ecbatana, and miraculously southward to the very banks of Indus. If Rome was the best teacher, he must have traced the voyage of Trajan down the Euphrates and across to the Tigris (his boats being handled over rollers), and so to the Persian Gulf. In fancy he must have marched again with Julian to the gates of Babylon. Perhaps he studied with professional interest the methods of Caracalla, who betrothed himself to the daughter of a Parthian king, and, when the population of Ctesiphon came forth to the marriage, attacked and slew them to the last man.

But for those who are planning vast aggressions maps are more useful reading than books. And the maps showed almost at a glance the point at which a world conqueror must take his grip.

The British Commonwealth must be either squared by market-bargaining or broken, and it became clear at last that the British had certain notions of international morality which (entirely hypocritical as they might seem) made them difficult to square. Very well, then: if this monstrous obstacle to a young nation's ambitions had to be broken, where would it break? The maps gave the answer.

The oil of Persia and Iraq was a *sine quâ non* to Britain in time of war. Five-sixths of the world's oil was located in the United States; half the rest was out of reach of Britain in Russia and Rumania. A hostile government in Iraq would endanger supplies both in Iraq and Persia. Here, certainly, effective intervention could force Britain to her knees. And oil was not all that was at stake.

Geographically, the position of Britain and her partners was almost an absurdity. The centre-piece, a tapering island off the north-west coast of Europe, was not in the centre at all. If the unwieldy edifice had any geographical centre it was India; and India, separated from the 'centre-piece' by the whole mass of Europe and of Asia Minor, was connected with it only by a tiny island here and there, some shares in a canal, and a fortified rock. There were countries along the route which could have been British possessions had the British been logical;

but the British, fortunately for an unsentimental rival, were constantly forsaking logic.

Elsewhere, the British communications—with Canada, with South Africa—lay in wide seas which the German undersea fleet would make a suicides' circus. With the help of Fascist Italy and possibly of Spain, the Mediterranean could be sealed off at the western end. But it was not enough to cut the route which led to India, to Malaya, to Australia; it was necessary to command it. For land fighting, for the scientific manipulation of giant armies, the Germans had a native genius which made them invincible; between England and India the German army must stand as a barrier of steel and fire. The thought was intoxicating. A German army in Asia, with unlimited slave-labour, with herds and grain to be had for the commanding; food for soldiers and the food of engines—oil: thousands and thousands of tons of oil. From such a base new armies could go out like thunderbolts; from its ports the submarines could range the Arabian Sea, the coasts of India and of Africa. Chief gain of all, perhaps: from such a base the air, the fastest and perhaps the last connection between the British Crown and its dominions, would be owned and mastered. British aircraft far from their oil and landing grounds, aircraft carrying plans and dispatches, aircraft with diplomatists, technicians and soldiers, with medical supplies and delicate machinery: every one would have to pass (if it could) through a grid of Messerschmitts which fought at short range from their hangars and their fuel. The last, the central artery of British thought and enterprise, would become a leaking pipe.

This was an ambitious dream. But to reimpose the idea of a Master Race on a world which had already moved some way towards more humane philosophies it was necessary to think in the largest terms.

And the design was not impracticable. By 1940, with most of Europe subjugated, with a German-Italian army in North Africa which made the capture of Egypt a reasonable military assumption, the plan had become something more than a fanatic's reverie. One claw of the gigantic pincers was already forged. The other claw must travel far to meet it: but the Balkans seemed already ripe for plucking; no enemy had found an answer to the German massed-tank technique; and experience had proved that—if the rules of international behaviour were not too pedantically observed—the weaker countries could be virtually annexed before the first German soldier arrived.

In the two and a quarter thousand years since Alexander's death at Babylon the balance points of civilization had changed: the political world was at once larger and smaller, the British Commonwealth was a wholly new phenomenon. And in great measure war had changed, adopting new methods and a new dimension, demanding new resources. Yet, strangely, this man who in the 1920's planned to dominate the world found some of the old solutions re-emerging. To the country

A BATTLEGROUND THROUGH FOUR MILLENNIA

of the Tigris and Euphrates Cyrus and Alexander had led their armies; Trajan from the West had sailed to Babylon, Tamerlane from the East had marched upon Baghdad. Through four millennia, geography had made that land a magnet to history's conquerors; and in the twentieth century it cast its spell over the latest candidate for the mastery of the world.

CHAPTER III

ON THE HIGHWAY TO INDIA

THE last foreign power to hold Iraq in possession was the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Sulaiman took Baghdad in the early sixteenth century, and with one short interval of Persian rule Turkish sovereignty lasted until the first World War, when the Turks were driven out by the British. In some ways Turkish rule was acceptable to a predominantly tribal people; it was generally remote and slipshod, oriental in its attitude to money matters; it did not expect too much. But under such sovereignty a country would make no progress, and in a fiercely competitive world, with a soil which had grown gradually less fertile since the Mongols had wrecked the irrigation system, Iraq had to make progress or perish. Since 1918 the predominant outside influence in Iraq's development has been that of Great Britain.

From the beginning of the seventeenth century Britain had commercial interests in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, which were developed under special licence, first (at the time of Persian domination) from Shah Abbas. Very early, this trade was subjected to sabotage by pirates from the coast of the Persian Gulf, and the East India Company was obliged to send warships to protect it. In time the Company was granted, by treaty with the coastal Arabs, the right and responsibility of maintaining good order in the Gulf. Henceforth the Gulf was charted by British surveyors, piracy was suppressed, the slave trade was gradually diminished and traffic in arms brought under control.

It was Napoleon's drive to the east which first gave definite shape to British policy in the Gulf and the countries of its coast. As early as 1764 a British consulate had been established at Basra; in 1794 a British Resident was appointed at Baghdad. This Resident was to perform the routine duties of a consul, the transmission of government dispatches, the care of British mercantile interests. But he was also required to watch and counteract the activities of French agents in the Mesopotamia region. For by now, slowly and reluctantly, the British Government had come to realize that the Persian Gulf meant something more than a trade outlet which could be left to the care of merchants. With the government of the Gulf countries Westminster had not the smallest wish to interfere. The British wanted no territory for themselves in these sun-scorched lands; the idea of fighting to win such ground would have seemed, had anyone proposed it, a simple absurdity. But to have the Sultan's lieutenants in Baghdad was one thing; to have Napoleon's marshals there would be another. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries British statesmen, too, had studied

ancient history. What Alexander the Great had done was not beyond the capacity of this Napoleon who could drive his cannon into Egypt and to Moscow. For themselves, the Tigris and Euphrates meant little. But they were on a highway into India and the southern hemisphere; let the French dictator occupy that highway and the British Empire would have entered upon its decline and fall.

From the year of Waterloo the menace changed. It was Imperial Russia, now, who threatened to get such hold upon the Middle East as would enable her to strike against India; and towards the end of the nineteenth century Lord Curzon, Under Secretary of State for India and later Foreign Secretary under Lord Salisbury, exposed this menace in the plainest terms. He asked:

"Are we prepared to surrender control of the Persian Gulf and divide that of the Indian Ocean? Are we prepared to make the construction of the Euphrates Valley Railroad or some kindred scheme an impossibility for England and an ultimate certainty for Russia? Is Baghdad to become a new Russian capital in the south? Lastly, are we content to see a naval station within a few days' sail of Karachi and to contemplate a hostile squadron battering Bombay?"

Curzon himself was not; and to demonstrate the fact that Britain would not allow foreign interference with Arab rulers in the Gulf he more than once sent troops and cruisers to the help of friendly shaikhs who were being threatened by the Turkish power. But cruisers were seldom, and only in the last resort, the instruments of British policy. It was a policy of watchfulness and of local friendships. British consuls lived quietly in houses planned to give some small protection against the sweltering climate; they travelled unceremoniously; and in these peculiar islanders from Europe, so eccentric and yet so simple, the Arab peoples found men whom they could trust.

In 1903, when the Germans, in their turn, were first revealing Middle East ambitions, Curzon, as Viceroy of India, paid a visit to Sharja, on the Gulf coast, and in a speech to an assembly of local chiefs he once more made the British attitude quite clear. He said:

"The great Empire of India, which it is our duty to defend, lies almost at your gates. We saved you from extinction at the hands of your neighbours. We opened these seas to the ships of all nations and enabled their flags to fly at peace. We have not destroyed your independence but have preserved it. We are not now going to throw away this century of costly and triumphant enterprise; we shall not wipe out the most unselfish page in history. The peace of these waters must still be maintained; your independence will continue to be upheld; and the influence of the British Government must remain supreme."

These were not thoughtless or groundless boasts.

The source of danger had shifted. New powers, new personalities

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emerged. But the British attitude remained the same. On the country between the Gulf and the Caspian the British had no designs. But the Empire had grown to something more than a system of trading-posts: it was an institution to which many millions looked for justice and security, and that institution must not be, would not be, endangered.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER 1919: BRITAIN AND THE IRAQ MANDATE

THE story of Iraq between the wars is, in its earlier chapters, an integral part of the history of all the Arab countries; it is a complex tale of diplomatic manoeuvre, of idealism and greed, patience and exasperation, fanaticism and wisdom. It includes a brief, tragic period of fighting. By degrees the strident voices dropped into silence; the crowd of cooks who wished to stir the broth diminished, the Iraqi people were left to work out with Britain their own political future. The goal was independence, and a series of treaties brought them gradually towards it. It was not a simple or easy progress.

Iraq in 1919 was a new entity, consisting of three former Turkish provinces (called 'vilayets') joined together. Within its borders there were important racial minorities; there were nomad tribes which had never been effectively controlled; there were, in addition to several minority religions, two main branches of the Mohammedan Faith, Sunni and Shiah, sometimes as fanatically opposed as Roman Catholics and Protestants in Tudor England. Economically the country was in feeble health, cursed by its geography and climate, by a hitherto piecemeal organization and by reach-me-down communications. To build on such foundations a state which could hold its own with politically mature nations there was need for statesmen and civil servants of the highest calibre: men trained in the traditions of good government, experienced administrators, skilled technologists. It was no fault of the Iraqi, mainly a pastoral people who had always lived under alien rule, that they could not find a body of such experts overnight.

Some other nation had, for the time being, to supply a great part of such experience, and the League of Nations had given this responsibility to Britain. No one of intelligence would claim that Britain accepted the task out of simple altruism. It has been shown already that Britain has one paramount and permanent interest in the Middle East, one principle of policy for which she gave many lives in 1914-18: the principle that no hostile power can be allowed to menace her imperial communications. She had, in addition, very large economic interests, of which the most vital is the oilfield of Kirkuk. These interests were generally recognized by the Iraqi (who have come to draw a considerable part of their revenue from the royalties paid on oil production), while distinguished Iraqi patriots have stated that the balance of advantage between the two nations is fair and equal.

The progress made in this unique political experiment depended primarily on the Iraqi themselves. In their first King, Faisal ibn Hussain of the Hashimite family, they discovered a man with the loftiest gifts of character and statesmanship: ministers such as Nuri Pasha as-Said showed that the combination of political acumen with a high sense of public duty would appear in the new as in far older nations. Above all, the great body of the Iraqi people, untrained though they were in political responsibility, revealed a heart and mind for their country's advancement. They were, in the main, a tribal people. They understood the force of tribal law. Within the tribal compass they were practised in honourable dealing. If their sense of values was not wide it was still a clear sense: they were accustomed to the ownership of beasts, they knew that beasts need pasture, that food and shelter should have a higher place in man's calculations than the tawdry embellishments of living. The meaning of liberty they understood as many Europeans were ceasing to understand it. They had within them, ready for stitching, the stuff of nationhood.

They were generally fortunate in the British pioneers who came to them. Before the first World War it had become something like a law of nature that the Arabian lands should incubate distinguished Englishmen: men tough enough to travel and live without western comforts, having enough of European culture to make them see an alien culture with appreciative eyes and alien philosophies with understanding; men who could sympathize with tribal conservatism yet not forget the meaning of progress; who could enwrap themselves in the Arabian way of life while preserving the mental fibre of their own. Names such as Leachman and 'Skaishpeer' (as the Arabs called W. M. I. Shakespeare), Arnold Wilson, Lawrence, Joyce, Newcombe, Storrs are a few among the many which will always be remembered in Iraq. While above even such personalities as these rises the tremendous figure of Sir Percy Cox, the first High Commissioner administering the Mandate: one who knew the Iraqi as few have known them, a man infinite in sympathy and patience, untiring in diplomacy, unshakable in resolution; after whom Iraqi name their children 'Cokus' unto this day. Such men as these, inheriting certain traditions of administration, performed intuitively the double role imposed on them as servants of their own country and of Iraq. On such personalities, and the friendships which they engendered, the walls of the new kingdom were laid.

Only in fairy-tale kingdoms (and in few of those) is everyone wise and disinterested, competent and good. In a man's growth adolescence is a time of difficulties; it is not less so in the adolescence of a nation. In this new kingdom there were (as elsewhere) men who wanted to step forward a hundred years at a time; there were (as elsewhere) men who said that the old ways were good enough for them. Among the experts sent to advise the new administration not everyone was a Cox or a

AFTER 1919: BRITAIN AND THE IRAQ MANDATE

Gertrude Bell. The new state developed, as other states have done, by a process of gradual agreements; not without debate, not without narrow manoeuvre or disillusionment, not without periods of acrimony. Yet it did develop. Knowing all the obstacles, friends of Iraq were still confident that the great experiment of independence would succeed, and they were prepared to pay a heavy price in labour and patience to see it through. To these builders the events of 1941 were to come not as a disaster but as a cruel interruption.

CHAPTER V

GERMAN PRELUDE: 1933-1941

THE intentions of Hitler towards Iraq have already been suggested, and it was not to be supposed that Germany would view the progress of Iraq in friendship with Britain either sympathetically or without interest. Some years before the war she was already sowing her own seeds in this not yet tidy Garden of Eden, using methods in which she took a special pleasure and pride.

One of these methods was commercial penetration. Very early in their career the Nazis evolved a technique for manipulating currencies, and by this device a German company called Haavara was able to offer the Iraqi traders business on most favourable terms. The tribesmen—it is interesting to observe—were not much impressed by these cheap-jack offers. But in the towns a great part of the trading was done by immigrants who were particularly susceptible to the attraction of quick money. These were easy game. Between 1935 and 1938 the Germans doubled their trade. And no merchandise was ever sent from Germany without a sheaf of propaganda. Simultaneously, propaganda was being distributed in other ways. A German Directorate of Propaganda in Iraq was formed, with financial resources adequate for dealing with local newspapers. For the many who could not read, powerful stations broadcast in local languages and accommodating German traders were able to supply receiving sets at the equivalent of forty shillings each. The Arabs were encouraged to believe that the Germans took a philanthropic interest in the Pan-Arab Movement, while racial minorities were told that their cause was particularly dear to the German heart. In general, the pose of the Germans was that of a bachelor uncle with his pockets full of half-crowns. Dr. Grobba, the German Minister, was a gifted man of great personal charm and he was lavish in his hospitality. The Iraqi Director of Education was invited to Germany and fêted there. Traders, doctors were also invited. They were lavishly entertained, they were given interesting views of achievements of the Third Reich; and there was nothing to pay. To the imposing new sports stadium in Baghdad the Germans gave most generous patronage.

Neither were the children neglected. The Germans were at pains to manifest a particular sympathy with young Iraqi. A youth society was formed in the government schools and named 'Futwah' after a twelfth-century order of Arabic chivalry; its uniform included plus-fours and Sam Browne belts, its programme comprised high ideals and a moderate amount of military training. The movement seemed so

admirable that for a short time the pupils of an American Mission School were encouraged to join it. Presently representatives of the society were given a trip to Germany to see, under the closest political chaperonage, how the youth of that virile and forward-looking nation were organized. They were greatly impressed (and the pupils of the American Mission School were promptly withdrawn from their membership of Futwah). Talk of German virtues increased. A people not lavishly supplied with amusements will spend much of its time in conversation. Intrigue is not unwelcome. In the village markets and teeming bazaars, in the broad, open cafés where elderly Arabs sit for hours on wooden benches, it began to be said that the Germans were unmistakably the people of the future: it was the Germans who really sympathized with Arab aspirations—did not the Germans themselves say so, and were they not most generous in their support of the Moslem Guidance Society, the Muthana Club, the Palestine Defence Society? With the guidance of such apparently benevolent, progressive and disinterested people, could not Iraq get away from the slow and tedious route to becoming a fully developed nation, could she not achieve wealth, power and complete independence in one bound?

But it was for the Iraqi Army that the Germans showed the highest solicitude: less, perhaps, for the rank and file than for senior members. For these the Germans could not do too much. In Germany, where Iraqi officers were hospitably entertained, they found that their opinion on military subjects was highly valued by experienced officers of the Reichswehr. A sense of good-fellowship prevailed. At the parties given for young officers in Baghdad they found not only the charming Dr. Grobba, and Dr. Jordan the internationally distinguished German archæologist, but German girls as well. All German girls seemed to be gay and pretty, not one was without a particular admiration for Iraqi officers. This was an amenity to which young officers of any army are seldom totally blind.

The British Army has no politics, and the British tend to forget that a state of affairs with which they are familiar is not necessarily found all over the world. In a formative period, and when intellectual interests are not greatly diversified, a country finds that politics are its chief mental food. Power, personalities, rivalries are the common coin which is passed from mouth to mouth at street corners, which herdsmen gather in the villages and carry with them on their desert journeys. And it is not to be expected that air laden with such talk will be excluded from officers' messes. Historically, power is what soldiers look for; in earlier times a commander made his army strong with the single object of exerting his own power against his rivals. Where ministers of state have not had time or practice to establish their position firmly, an ambitious soldier may well feel that he himself or a man of his choice would do the job better; he may, indeed, think that to force a change

would gain larger ends for his country. With his thoughts turning that way he looks about for men who might support him: his fellow officers, civilian friends, rival politicians to those in power, perhaps a friendly foreigner. Junior officers struggling for promotion may see their own chance in such a man's ambitions. Loyalty to their own commander may earn a quicker reward than a more conventional sense of duty (and may, they in turn will argue, be ultimately to the nation's advantage). It should not be suggested that disloyalty was commonplace in the earliest years of the Iraqi Army. But intrigues did exist. And to the Germans, long accustomed to the idea of using an army as an internal political weapon, such intrigues opened up an agreeable field of endeavour. In 1936 General Baqir Sidqi, who was in charge of army manoeuvres, suddenly marched upon Baghdad, demanding a change of government. Bombs were dropped on the city, the Prime Minister was murdered. There is no proof that Sidqi was supported by the Germans and it may have been coincidence that he had a German wife, but the affair can hardly have been regarded without satisfaction in Berlin.

It remained for Germany, following her routine procedure, to discover an Iraqi politician through whom, when the time came, she could operate a revolution from behind the stage.

The Gailani family was among the noblest in Iraq. With this family a man called Rashid Ali had a connection; and although there is no evidence that he had any popularity with its members they honourably gave him assistance, admitting him to several appointments in connection with hereditary estates which they administered for religious purposes. Whether Rashid would have made a successful career without such support is a matter for conjecture. But he did not lack ability. He was shrewd, industrious, and abnormally ambitious. In money matters he showed such skill that he became responsible for an increasing proportion of the religious funds; while his talents in a minor government post impressed so keen-sighted an observer as Miss Gertrude Bell. He became, perhaps with the help of the Gailani name, a member of the Court of Appeal and from that point made steady progress in politics. For a period in 1933 he was Prime Minister. Whether he was more interested in money or in political power it is hard to say, and in regard to the allegation that the two sides of his activity were improperly connected it is better to give him the benefit of the doubt. "He had just one interest," a great Iraqi patriot has said, "and that was Rashid Ali." And the Germans liked a foreign politician to be ambitious.

By September 1939 the German groundwork, carefully conceived and methodically executed, was complete. The expulsion of the German Minister and his staff after the outbreak of the war made the organization of subversive activity more difficult; but the Fascist

Italian Minister, and subsequently the Japanese Minister, were generous with their good offices, and orders to German agents could still be sent in the security of diplomatic bags.

For the final development of the plan accurate timing was essential. If only for the sake of world opinion (a matter to which the Nazis still, strangely, gave forlorn attention) it was necessary for the rebellion in Iraq to precede the use of German armed force. But it must not precede German participation by too large an interval; for if support were delayed for more than a few days there was a chance that the constitutional government of Iraq would crush the rebellion and the whole carefully wrought fabric of German intrigue would go to waste. In short, the rebellion must not be launched until the Germans had a base from which their fighting aircraft could operate against Iraq. For this purpose Syria, virtually under German control through the medium of the Vichy government, would serve well enough; but at the beginning of 1941 Syria itself was so far from the limits of German domination that the establishment there of a proper air base (as distinct from a refuelling station) was a technical impossibility. Some stepping-stone was needed, and the island of Crete—earmarked for conquest in any case, as part of the German Balkans drive of spring 1941—looked as if it had been set in the Mediterranean precisely for that purpose. The way to Crete was through Greece. In Greece, owing to the deathless bravery of its people, the Italian fascists had failed to carry out the Axis programme. But neither the bravery of a small, hard-pressed nation nor the common principles of international morality would stand against the ruthlessness, the numbers, the scorching fire-power of German arms.

In April 1941 the Germans invaded Greece. The drive for the German domination of Iraq had begun.

CHAPTER VI

CRISIS IN IRAQ

BUT the timing went wrong. It went wrong because in Crete, as well as in Greece, the Germans met a far more stubborn resistance than they had expected. But primarily it went wrong because the Iraq Government was neither stupid nor blind.

It had been known to the Government for some time that five senior officers of the army (four of whom came to be known as "The Golden Square") were engaged in intrigue, and it was decided that they should be posted to commands remote from the capital where their power to be harmful would virtually cease. The order was given on the 25th March, 1941. One of the conspirators called on the Minister for Defence. He said, in plain terms, that the order for posting would not be obeyed; that it must, in fact, be cancelled; and that if it were not cancelled there would be trouble.

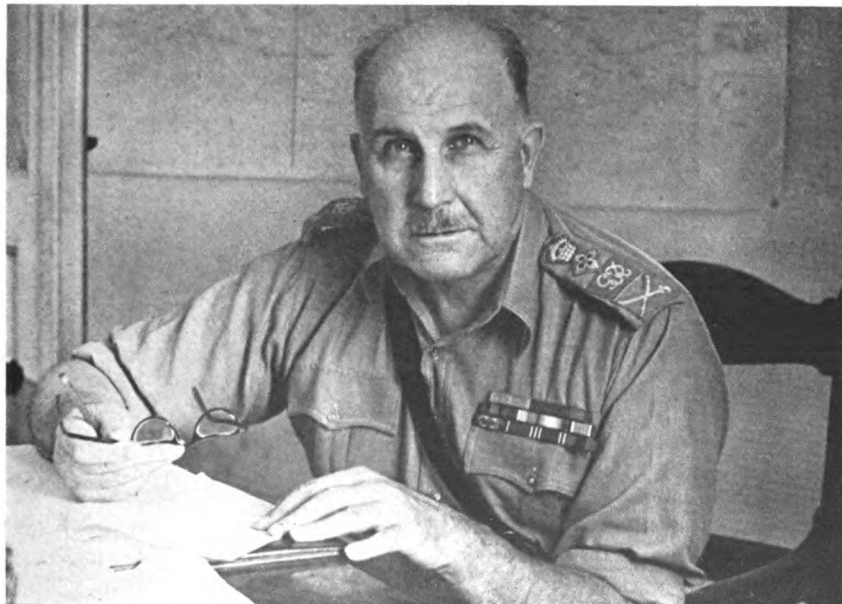
This was mutiny. The position in which the Defence Minister found himself was extremely grave. No one could calculate how far the seditious intrigue had spread: it was possible that the traitors had a grip on the whole army, and how could a nation fight its own armed forces! He began to temporize. But Prince Abdul Illah, who since King Ghazi's death had been Regent for his nephew the infant King Faisal II, had no such doubts. Inheriting the statesmanship of Faisal I, he was passionately devoted to his country. He knew what mutiny was. He knew that to surrender the government to a clique of adventurers would be tantamount to handing the country over to the Germans. And he also knew just what treatment Iraq could expect from them. There would, he said, be no surrender to the mutineers.

For this patriotism he very nearly paid with his life. The rebel officers were not to be thwarted by one man's resolution, even if that man happened to be the lawful Regent to whom they had sworn allegiance. Assassination was a time-honoured device in Eastern politics: they coolly decided to resort to it now. It was fortunate for the future of Iraq that the Regent was warned of their intention and was persuaded at the last moment to save himself; fortunate, also, that the American Legation were ready to act, in the interest of the lawful ruler of the country, with boldness and resource. On April 2nd the Regent, with their assistance, escaped to Habbaniya; from there he was flown to Basra, where he hoped to gather the loyalists about him and form a new cabinet.

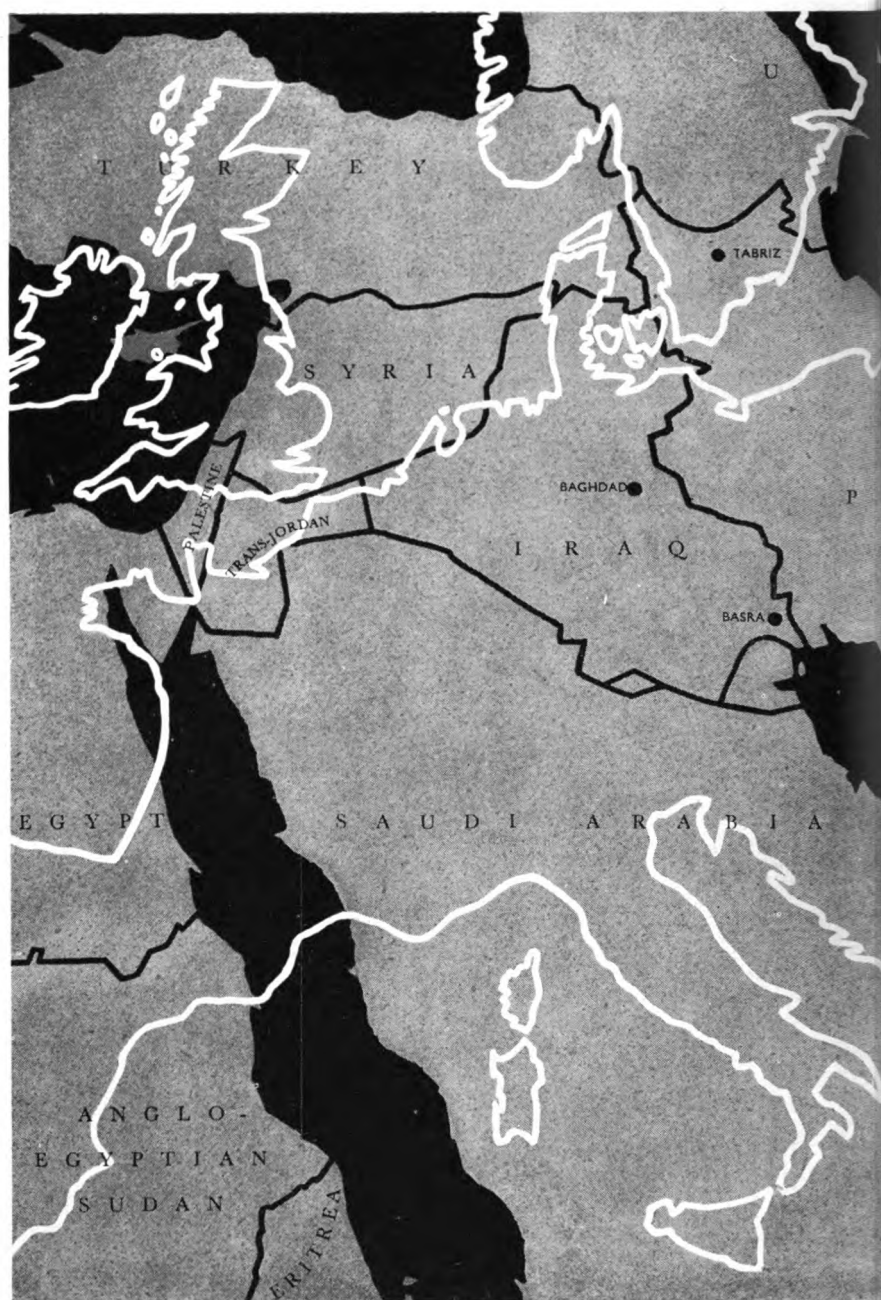
This was Rashid Ali's cue. He may well have been vexed that it came to him prematurely; but his new party, called Hizb al Sha'b,



Lieutenant-General (now General) Sir Edward Quinan, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., Indian Army, Commander-in-Chief until August 1942.

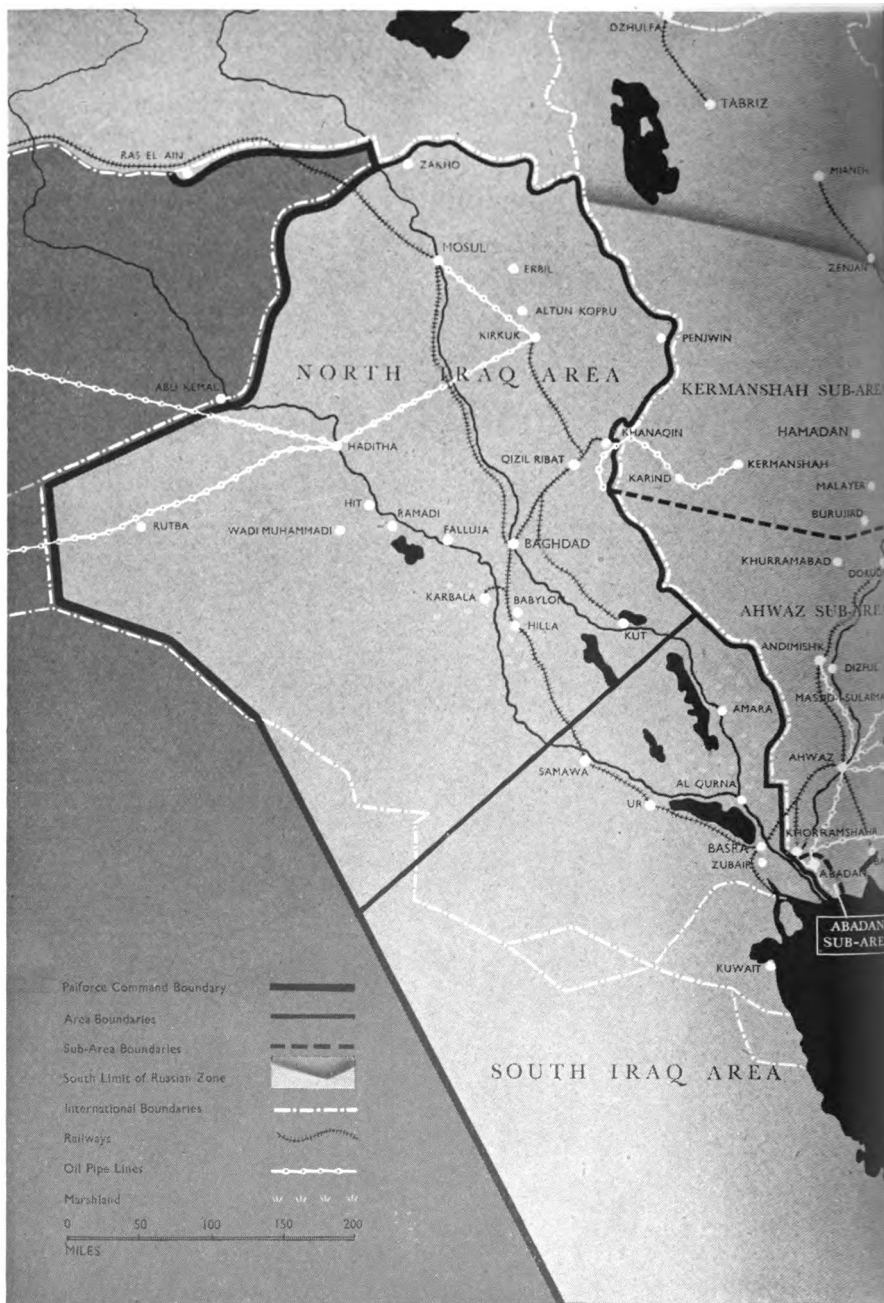


General (now Field-Marshal The Lord Wilson of Libya) Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, G.C.B., G.B.E., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief Aug. 1942 to Feb. 1943.

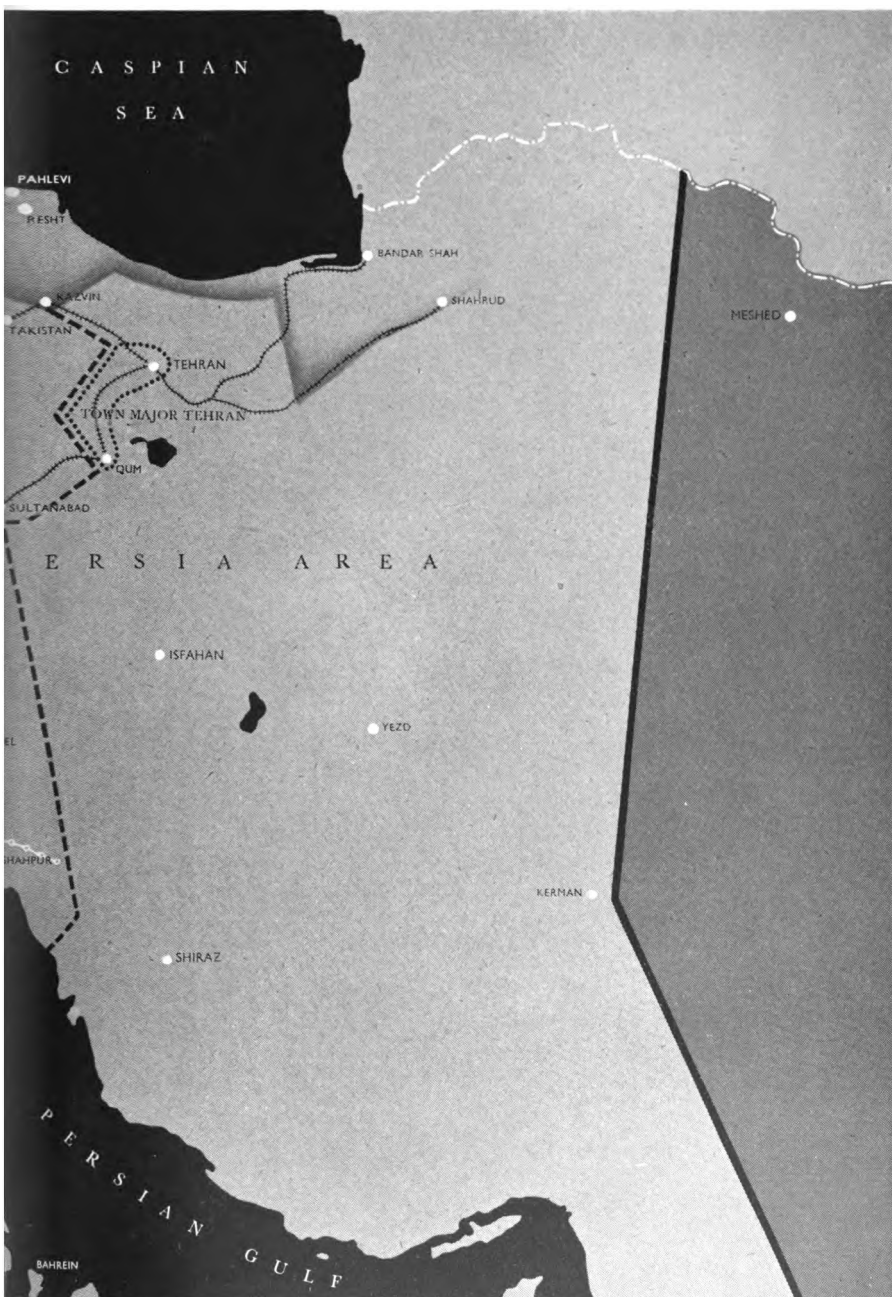


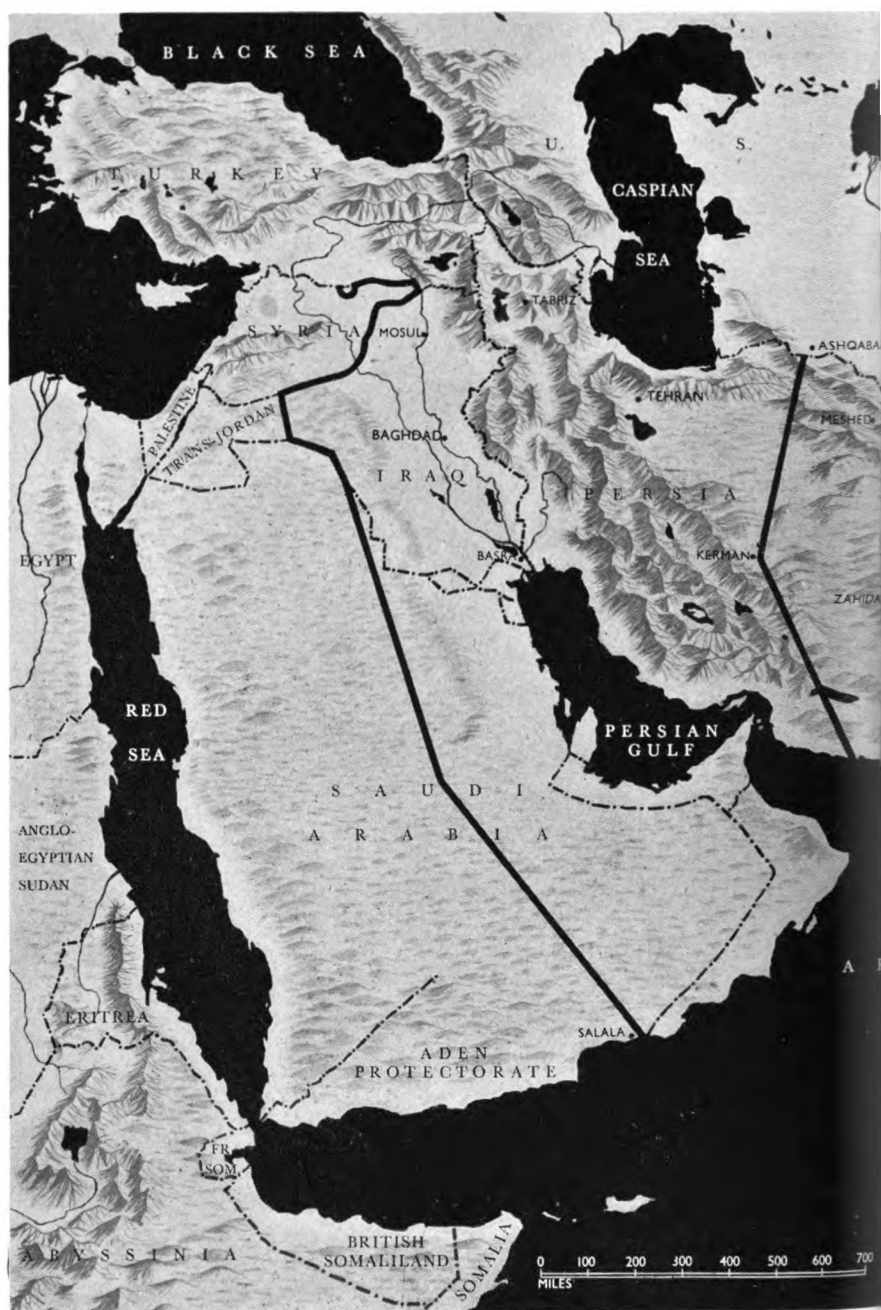
THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE: a comparison



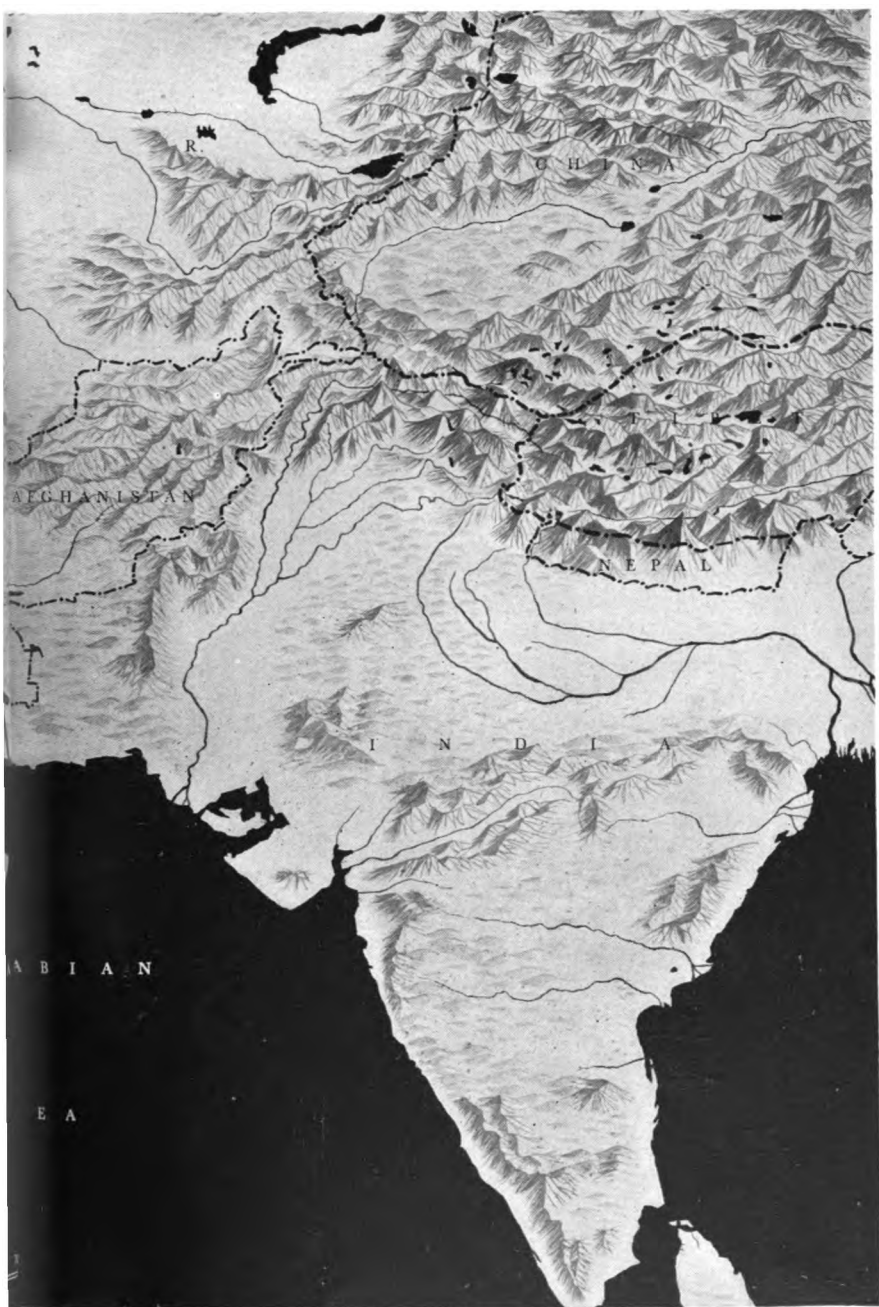


THE PAIFORCE COMMAND AREA





THE PAIFORCE COMMAND AREA and adjacent countries. The solid line



black lines show the Command boundaries



**Lieutenant-General Sir Henry R. Pownall, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C.,
Commander-in-Chief March to September 1943.**



**Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Smith, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C.,
last Commander-in-Chief of Paiforce.**

depended on the rebel officers for support, and had he failed to seize the chance they offered him his political career might have been over. Faced with that alternative he did not hesitate.

The means was to publish what purported to be a letter of resignation addressed by the Prime Minister to the Regent. This letter was, in fact, never delivered to the Regent at all. Rashid Ali then assumed the premiership, 'in accordance' (it was publicly announced) 'with the requests of the people and the army'. How 'the people' were supposed to have expressed such a request it is difficult to understand. Apparently 'the people' had made no further demands, for no cabinet was formed, and no list of potential ministers was published. Ingenuously, a proclamation 'from the army' was issued, stating that the army had put Rashid Ali in power and heaping the Regent with abuse. Annoyed though they must have been that the *coup d'état* had been mistimed, the Germans in their diligent fashion were ready with the propaganda which the situation demanded. The Press was at once brought under control, and the German wireless stations broke joyfully into a strident chorus of vituperation in which Britain, not unexpectedly, was the villain of the piece. The tragic dilemma of Palestine, always a useful stick for beating the British in Arab countries, was thrust into Iraqi ears with every decoration that an expert mendacity could conceive and with relentless reiteration. The old story that the British had murdered King Ghazi, who in fact had been killed in a motor accident, was brought out again. Race prejudice, class prejudice, religious odium, the grievance of 'inferiority'—every chord was played by the most expert, the least scrupulous propagandists in the world.

But another figure was already on the stage. On the day when the Regent had escaped with his life, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis had arrived at Baghdad as the new British Ambassador to Iraq. The two men actually met for a few minutes at Habbaniya airfield. Sir Kinahan was not a stranger to Iraq or to its personalities. He had been personal adviser to King Faisal I; he was a fluent speaker in Arabic.

The position in which the new Ambassador found himself could hardly have been more peculiar or less comfortable. There was no one to whom he could formally and lawfully present his letters of credence. The kingdom to which he was accredited was being run by a caucus of adventurers in practically open alliance with the nation which was trying (and was not unlikely) to exterminate his own. The arrival of German aircraft was expected hourly. The Iraq army was under the thumb of the rebels. And since Iraq had been given her independence there were no British soldiers in the country at all. Among Iraqi notables Sir Kinahan had, in fourteen years of previous residence, made many intimate friends; but with Rashid in power none of these could afford the risk of coming to see him. Thus isolated, he summed

up the situation, and, with full knowledge of the almost desperate military burden which Britain then carried, he advised his government that they must send troops to Iraq or be prepared to see the country in German hands.

An urgent exchange of cables took place between London and New Delhi. With the Germans forcing their way into Benghazi and thrusting towards Athens, with British and Commonwealth troops locked in the struggle for Ethiopia, with the Far Eastern menace daily increasing, there was not a battalion to spare. But necessity knows no argument. At Karachi a force under Major-General W. A. K. Fraser, consisting of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade with ancillary troops and one Field Regiment of artillery, was embarking for Malaya. It was decided to divert this force to Iraq. The force was not equipped for desert operations. It had not been loaded 'tactically': that is to say, its weapons were not stowed so that they could be deployed for immediate action on disembarkation. And it looked as if immediate action might be necessary. Time, however, counted for more than prudence. Simultaneously, three companies and one support platoon of the 1st Battalion, the King's Own Royal Regiment, were bundled into Valencias to be flown to Basra.

Under the terms of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930, His Britannic Majesty was obliged to inform the King of Iraq of his intention to land British troops on Iraq soil. With the Regent virtually in exile, the British Ambassador could only carry out this obligation by dealing with Rashid Ali himself, as the *de facto* authority. To the landing of the first brigade Rashid, who was perfectly familiar with the Treaty, could only agree. When he was informed of the approach of another brigade he started to raise objections, maintaining that the first brigade should by then have been moved on. To this there was a simple reply: that the annual flooding had made the movement of armed forces north from Basra an impossibility.

The interviews that followed were in the nature of a diplomatic duel. Rashid Ali knew well enough that the British had not the armed strength to fight in Iraq; he also knew that as every day passed they would struggle to improve their military chances. At first sight, his best course was to unleash the army immediately and drive the British right out of the country. But if something went wrong, if the British exercised their historic capacity for pulling chestnuts out of the fire, then the whole of his position might be lost before the Germans were near enough to give assistance and the best he could hope from them would be what soldiers call an Imperial Raspberry. Superficially, he held nearly all the cards; the one he lacked—as subsequent events were to prove—was the support of any but a trifling minority of the Iraq nation. And it is possible to feel a momentary sympathy with this small, bespectacled, ambitious and fundamentally crooked man,

matched against a large and singularly handsome Irishman who knew every move in the diplomatic game, who played it according to the rules and with a quiet enjoyment, and who was congenitally incapable of losing either his temper or his nerve.

The second brigade arrived at Basra from India on the 28th of April. On the 29th April, units of the Iraq army began to move out of Rashid Camp, in Baghdad, for what the junior officers and other ranks were told (and fully believed) was an Exercise. The place chosen for this training was fifty-five miles to the west of the capital, and was called Habbaniya.

The rights given to Great Britain by the 1930 Treaty included the maintenance and use by the Royal Air Force of certain stations. Habbaniya was one of these. Here, on the banks of the Euphrates, surrounded by an iron fence and by many hundred square miles of desert, an English township had been created, with tidy streets bearing the names London, Farnborough, Northolt; with neat bungalows where the doors fitted their frames and hot water came through the taps marked 'Hot'; with English lawns, luxuriant trees, and now, at the start of May, a tumult of flowers. Here, in addition to a thousand members of the R.A.F., lived a large number of Iraqi labourers and their families; and here, waiting to be taken away in the Valencias, was a small colony of British women and children who had been hastily evacuated from Baghdad.

This cantonment is on the north side of the airfield. On the south side there is a large plateau, perhaps a hundred feet high. A man standing on the edge of this plateau has the feeling that he could throw a stone into the cantonment. This is an illusion, for the distance is several hundred yards; but a good rifle shot could, from that position, put a bullet through a window of his choice. The whole cantonment is exhibited to that point of observation like one of the landscape targets which the British Army uses for training in target recognition: the huge hangars are in the foreground; and as if to serve as 'reference-point' there stands, almost in the centre, the great, high water-tank by which the trees and flowers, the human beings in that oasis are kept alive. It would be hard to imagine a more perfect position than this plateau for a force ordered to assault and destroy a village, and on this plateau Rashid Ali's force arrived: an infantry brigade, a mechanized artillery brigade, twelve armoured cars, one mechanized machine-gun company, a number of tanks: arrived, and began to dig itself in, with weapons pointing at the cantonment. It seemed, to the British who formed the aiming-mark, a peculiar kind of exercise. And the position was stranger still when the commander of the force, with a happy disregard for the Anglo-Iraq treaty, ordered the R.A.F. to stop their training.

But what was the answer to this challenge? The force available for

the ground defence of the station consisted of 1,200 R.A.F. Levies. Some of these were Arabs, some Kurds, and about half were Assyrian Christians, members of a tragic and landless race. These Levies, against all the threats which were showered upon them, were to remain completely loyal to the R.A.F. and to the Regent's cause; and (as some of them were later to demonstrate once again in a brilliant amphibious operation in Albania) they were highly skilled, resolute, and fearless fighting men. But the only weapons they had were rifles and Lewis guns: no carriers, no Brens, none of the supplementary weapons which are the standard equipment of an infantry battalion. Of British infantry, there were the mere 350 men under Lt.-Col. Everett whom the Valencias deposited at Habbaniya on the last day of April, and who were to add another page of splendour to the history of the King's Own Royal Regiment. There were also eighteen elderly (but still robust) armoured cars, and two ponderous ornaments outside the Depot Headquarters which on examination proved to be usable firing-pieces. Against the two brigades of Rashid's force, with their up-to-date artillery and other weapons, the sum of this defence looked like a sombre jest. It was understood that relief might be expected from a small British force of all arms which was assembling in Palestine. But Palestine was as far, across the desert, as Edinburgh from London, while the brigades from India were separated from Habbaniya by another four hundred miles of desert and an immense area of flood.

There would still have been a sportsman's chance in a policy of defiance if the R.A.F. Station had been occupied by operational squadrons. It was not. It was purely a training station. It had precisely sixty-four aircraft which could, by bold improvisation, be made to serve operationally. For some thirty of these there were pilots who were experienced but out of operational practice, and pupils could be found with just sufficient flying ability and more than sufficient nerve to steer the rest into battle. These were likely to be opposed by an Iraq air force which was far from negligible and which might be reinforced by German or Italian craft at any hour. From no aspect of military science was the defence of Habbaniya a reasonable proposition.

With all these factors before him, and in the nightmare of having a colony of women and children under his protection, the R.A.F. Commander determined to defend it.

In practice, one factor was in his favour: the men on the plateau had no good cause to fight for. Potentially these were able soldiers: from their stock a creditable army has since grown. They were also honourable fighters, as they were to show by scrupulously refraining from the bombardment of the hospital quarter. (The Germans, when they came, showed no such pedantic regard for the rules of warfare.) And soldiers having a sense of honour do not give of their best when their senior commanders become adventurers against the throne of their own

CRISIS IN IRAQ

country. This was a circumstance which was, at last, to prove decisive in the battle of Habbaniya. But it was not a factor on which the R.A.F. could reckon, for it is cardinal in military appreciations to suppose that the enemy's morale will be high.

The demand that flying practice should cease was refused, verbally and by hearty demonstration. Further, the Rashid Ali force was informed of the hardly disputable fact that its presence on the plateau was tantamount to an act of war; it was requested to continue its manœuvres elsewhere. This demand in turn was refused. Normal communications between the R.A.F. and the British Embassy had been cut, but the R.A.F. had methods of their own for communication, and the Embassy were asked, approximately, whether it is legal to punch a man who is holding a heavy club over your head. On this nice question the Embassy gave formal advice, and the army on the plateau was then told that it must be gone by 05.00 hours on the 2nd May.

When it grew light on the 2nd May the army was still there. The R.A.F. training craft, rigged with improvised bomb-racks, swarmed into the sky. At 05.50 hours the first bombs fell on the plateau. In fifty-five seconds, by the watch of the Station Accounting Officer (who was, like his kind, an accurate man), the answering shells crashed down.

CHAPTER VII

THE MIRACLE OF HABBANIYA

THE miracle of Habbaniya was achieved by coolness, by violent, unflagging labour, and by a measureless impudence. There were officers who understood the nature of war well enough to know what was possible and what was not; these, in their most private minds, could see that the fall of the cantonment was only a matter of time. The water situation by itself was not unlikely to decide the affair. The problem had been tackled; every bath, every available vessel, was kept full; but once the water-tower had been hit—and it did not seem possible that there were any gunners in the world who could fail to hit it—the slow death of the station would have started. Stores of food might last longer, but there were several thousand mouths to feed and all new supplies had to be flown for hundreds of miles, in the few craft available, over enemy guns. It was still more likely that the station would be subject to direct assault. When Rashid Ali's brigades, with liberal artillery and tank support, decided to sweep down upon the cantonment there would be no surrender; but it would be the end.

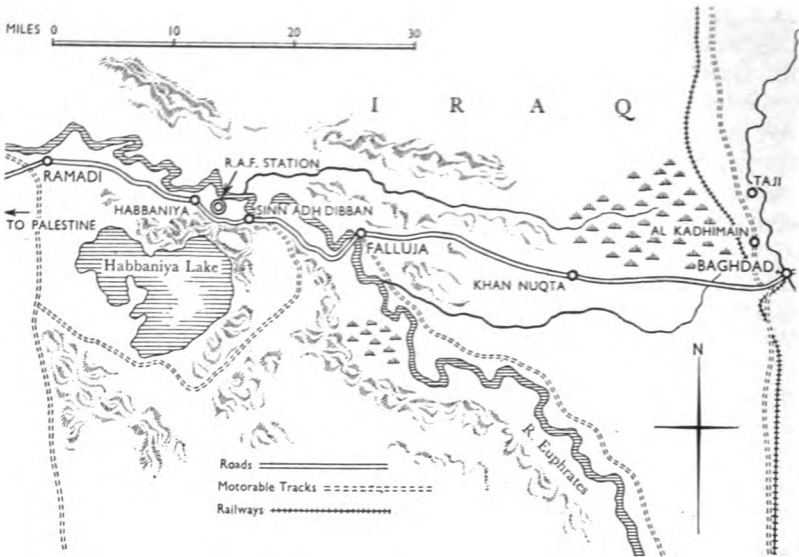
With these facts before their eyes the garrison lived, worked and fought as if all the advantage were on their side, as if the rout of the enemy were only a matter of energy and time. "Three-quarters of the chance of success depend on a confident spirit", the Air Headquarters Bulletin mathematically observed, "and only one-quarter on material conditions." Aircraft were fuelled, loaded and started up behind the hangars; as soon as they were ready they taxied round the corner to the runways and took off under the enemy's nose. As each craft came back the fitters and riggers swarmed upon it; there was only one question, could it by any patching up and contrivance be made to mount the air once more? They worked methodically for nineteen hours a day and cursed the darkness for stealing the other five. Despite these efforts the number of serviceable aircraft dwindled; but a few Blenheims came to join the company, and to the army on the plateau it still appeared that through all the hours of daylight and, later, in the night as well the sky was alive with British planes. Methodically, the airmen attacked the gun positions, swooped on airfields from which hostile craft were already joining the fight, played havoc with supply columns moving up to the plateau from Baghdad. Methodically, the British families were emplaned for Basra, the families of the Levies for Palestine. At their hasty meals men watched the shells falling and laid bets of fifty fils on the time when the water-tower would catch one, while station officers, disturbed by a stream of machine-gun bullets

through the roof of their mess, made vigorous complaints in the Suggestion Book. Methodically, an administrative officer ran down to the Gulf to deposit currency and returned with a plane-load of groceries. Each day Intelligence put out a sheet to tell the garrison how the world war progressed, with a note or two on events at Habbaniya; and having digested this with his sandwiches, a man who could hardly be called a pupil now would go rather wearily back to the hangars, bully the remnants of an Audax into the air, and methodically bomb the enemy posts again.

The ground defence was no less aggressive; indeed, it would be hard to find in comparatively small-scale warfare a better sermon on the familiar text that only aggressive defence will succeed. Naturally a basic defence system had been minutely planned and was put into effect, the perimeter being divided into sectors of responsibility, with blockhouses and communication trenches. But the main preoccupation of the King's Own and of the Levies (which were both under the command of Colonel Brawn, O.C. Land Defence) was to seek the enemy and strike him: a policy so effective that from the start of the long-drawn action the defenders held continuous command of 'no-man's-land' between the two forces. On the first day some enemy guns were giving trouble from the other side of the Euphrates. A platoon from one of the Kurdish companies crossed the wide, fast-flowing river in an old motor-boat and, with only small-arms covering fire from one of the blockhouses, advanced upon the guns across open and partially flooded ground. They had caused some thirty casualties among the gun crews before machine-gun fire forced them back. A few days later a patrol working north of the river took possession of an enemy car, several rounds of 3.7 howitzer ammunition and some spare parts. The heavily laden car was dragged in full view for several miles along the top of the bund, then put on to a motor-boat and bumboat lashed together and ferried across the swollen river. By now the enemy had become exceedingly wary of Levy patrols, which at night ranged far to hunt them in outlying posts: and in time so sharply was the power of the patrols realized that the enemy vacated his forward posts at night. It was this kind of supremacy which the defence planned to create. With the troops available, as compared with the enemy's, it could not be done except by a continuous daring. That it was done is proved by the fact that no enemy patrols attempted to penetrate the British lines.

The Levies liked to be busy, and by way of recreation, when they were neither patrolling nor shooting from the blockhouses, they developed their training. Some of this was automatic; a diarist recorded with quiet satisfaction that "cars, bicycles and orderlies continued to assemble on the front door-step until a little bombing and shelling made all arrangements quite perfect". With more deliberation, and under the friendly tutelage of the King's Own, they studied the

PAIFORCE



AREA OF THE HABBANIYA EPISODE

Bren gun; and since the enemy were too well concealed to serve as targets they practised on the ranges. "A quiet and uneventful day", the diarist occasionally remarks. It may be wondered if the enemy found the days equally agreeable.

The first large reward for the defenders' nonchalant audacity came on the 6th May. There had been some activity the night before, when an enemy patrol was caught in the open and severely damaged. At first light the routine reconnaissance of the plateau was made. It was empty. And some way off the last of the enemy vehicles were retreating eastwards. The worst defensive position in the world had been more than held.

But the enemy had not gone far. At the eastern end of the airfield the road twisted through a spur of the escarpment; between this spur and the Euphrates he was in positions which would effectively hold the road against any advance towards Baghdad. This was intolerable to the R.A.F., who had decided that, given time, they could win the whole war with pupils in patched-up aeroplanes. It was intolerable to the Levies, who now believed with some justification that they could beat anyone with their bare hands. And the King's Own were not prepared to tolerate it for as much as a few hours. The position centred on a village called Sinn adh Dibban and known to the British, who liked places to have homely names, as Sidi Barrani. A plan to capture this village was formulated immediately. By 7.30 that morning the attack was under way.

Initially it was mounted by two companies of the King's Own, with R.A.F. armoured cars ranging the plateau to protect their right flank. The battle in its opening phase did not go well. The enemy, showing coolness and tactical sense, held their fire until the leading company was almost on top of their positions and then opened up with Vickers and Brens from the front and from the left flank. The attackers made a spirited effort to drive their assault home, but the volume of fire against them was too great. Much damaged, they fell back, while the armoured cars executed a considerable vengeance on their right. At the sewage farm, where they started to collect their casualties and re-form, they were still under intermittent fire and a counter-attack was expected. This was a moment for which the Levies had waited eagerly, and a Commer car manned from No. 3 Company drove up at full speed into the battleground to attack the enemy so ferociously with Vickers fire that the King's Own were given breathing space. They now launched a second attack, and this time the equivalent of artillery support was provided by the R.A.F., who had been shown their targets from the ground and who bombed them with extraordinary accuracy and daring. The 'Habbaniya Artillery' also came into action, leading the startled enemy to suppose that heavy guns had been flown up from Basra. (They had not realized what can be done, at a pinch, with ornamental howitzers.) With this access of covering fire the King's Own stove in the enemy's right flank, pounced upon the village and gained the ridge behind. It was then the Levies' turn again. No. 4 Company, covered by the armoured cars, was lorried out to an assault position on the British right flank, deployed there, and went straight in to the attack upon two posts still held by the enemy. These posts also crumpled, and the Sinn adh Dibban position was not occupied by the enemy again. The action had not been without cost; seven of the King's Own were killed, twelve of the King's Own and two Levies were wounded; but the enemy sustained nearly a thousand casualties, excluding the 26 officers and 408 men who were captured. It was, at this early stage of the war, an interesting example of precise co-operation between ground and air, and the battle comradeship of the King's Own and the Levies will not be forgotten by either. But pre-eminently it was another example, a classic in miniature, of the almost mystic power of the offensive mentality.

The ambition of the 'defence' (if it could still be called so) immediately stretched further. Twenty miles nearer to Baghdad the road crossed the Euphrates at a small town called Falluja, and so long as the enemy held this crossing an advance upon the capital from the west was virtually impossible. Falluja, then, was the next objective. The task would have been a stiff one for a force limited by no problems of manpower or equipment, for the village commanded the bridge and until the bridge was secured it was impossible, except by extremely

circuitous means, to bring in an attack upon the village. Moreover, there were Messerschmitts in the sky now. But neither the King's Own nor the Levies were to be restrained by such considerations as these. Their equipment had now been much augmented by weapons and other material captured at Sinn adh Dibban, including some 3.7 howitzers which would provide them with a supporting battery. Patrols kept the territory as far west as Ramadi, 20 miles away, and within a wide arc north of the river, under their unchallenged command. The R.A.F. were systematically punishing the reinforcements which the enemy tried to get through to Falluja, while on the British side some small reinforcements which included fighting and specialist troops were coming through from Basra as fast as aircraft could be found to lift them. At all events, what had happened at Sinn adh Dibban could happen again. And the work of constructing a ferry across the Euphrates, by the aid of which a flying column might work round to attack Falluja from the rear, was begun at once.

In the long view, the capture of Falluja might have been a splendid but useless achievement, for the garrison of Habbaniya, with four platoons already detached as standing patrols and with a heavy programme of patrolling to maintain, could scarcely have spared a force large enough to hold the place when it was won. Logically, Falluja was only an interim objective; Baghdad, where several hundred British citizens confined in the Embassy and the hospitable American Legation were wondering what would happen next, was the real goal, and even the defenders of Habbaniya could hardly contemplate a 55-mile march upon Baghdad. But the background was changing. A cloud of sand thrown up by British vehicles was moving eastward from Palestine across the desert. The enemy, getting rumours of this new menace, supposed that they would now have tanks to deal with. The British were more accurately informed, but to them it was enough that they were to be reinforced by fighting men and by guns. The approaching column was commanded by Brigadier J. J. Kingstone, D.S.O., M.C. It consisted, in fact, of the 4th Mechanized Cavalry Brigade, made up from the Household Cavalry Regiment, the Wiltshire Yeomanry and the Warwickshire Yeomanry, with two companies of the 1st Battalion, the Essex Regiment, three squadrons of the Transjordan Frontier Force, eight R.A.F. armoured cars which had been rushed from North Africa, and a very modest allocation of field and anti-tank artillery. To serve as guides and as a protective screen it had men of the Arab Legion, desert fighters of almost fabulous endurance and resource, who were commanded by the equally prodigious Glubb Pasha, and who at this time when the Germans seemed certain to win the war remained unshakably loyal to the British. For small parties, the crossing of the Syrian desert is not generally a difficult matter. But to take the several hundred vehicles of a brigade group at high speed across the desert at a

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time when the great Baghdad-Haifa road had not been completed involved administrative problems which were not trivial; the column received some attention from hostile aircraft, suffering casualties, and in the unclouded sunlight of this exceptionally hot mid-May the soldiers bumping in the crowded lorries over villainous tracks or man-handling them out of soft sand underwent great hardship. The column reached Habbaniya on the 18th, and was given a few days' interval to get into battle condition. Meanwhile the garrison sighed happily, and on the same evening started to execute their Falluja plan.

The tactics had been devised by Lt.-Col. Roberts, an Intelligence Staff officer who had been flown up from Basra to become commander of all the available forces, and who went about telling everyone (whether or no he privately believed it) that the enemy had not a hope in Hades against them and that Falluja was a piece of cake; if the garrison were in no special need of this tonic, they none the less took it gratefully. (And in this record of the events at Habbaniya, it is fitting that due tribute should be paid to Lt.-Col. Roberts for his remarkable personal influence on events. It was largely due to his drive and force of character that the operation proved, in the event, so successful.) The plan, in its essence, was to isolate the town by means of three groups placed west, north-west and north-east of it by night: to demand its surrender, and, if that were refused, to take it by shock. Another column was to disguise the intention by making a feint attack on Ramadi, which lay eighteen miles from Habbaniya in the opposite direction. The difficulties of the plan (in which lay the seeds of its success) were that the Euphrates ran between Habbaniya and the northward positions, while the westward position was also separated by floods which the rebels had made by breaching a dyke. The means to surmount these formidable obstacles had been worked out with the greatest precision. As soon as darkness fell the slow, delicate and dangerous business of ferrying the northward columns across the river began; these columns, which were supported by R.A.F. bridging and working parties, consisted of No. 2 Company of the Levies, a Company of Gurkha Rifles, and a flight of R.A.F. armoured cars. The ferry, improvised 'as a hobby' by professional engineers and amateur artisans, did its job, and the boat parties, operating on a minutely detailed drill, got over safely. Meanwhile the King's Own, with whom it was now almost routine to be flown into battle, were embarking in their familiar Valentias; they were to be landed in the north-east position, where the armoured cars were to support them. On the near side of the river a column of Levies commanded by Captain A. Graham of the Green Howards was also facing an amphibious operation, which they had studiously rehearsed in the R.A.F. swimming-pool and which was now hindered by every device of ill-fortune. The pack-mules, who regarded the affair with high disfavour, went into reverse as soon as the

water reached their fetlocks; lorries feeling their way in total darkness along the difficult track were ditched; and one of the boats, performing a half-roll, pitched a Gunner officer and his signaller into the deep water of the breach. But by sweat and patience, and in the absolute silence which distinguishes troops in advanced training, men, guns and ammunition were brought safely across the floods. By first light, as if all the movements had been executed under Aldershot Tattoo conditions, the columns were ready in their battle stations.

Hitherto the R.A.F. had refrained from bombing Falluja, as a number of civilians were known to be still living there. They now dropped leaflets demanding the town's surrender and at the same time giving detailed instructions on the way in which civilians were to leave it. The demand was ignored, and the town was then heavily bombed. At midday Graham's column was ordered by field telephone to advance and force an entry. It was an uninviting task, for the ground to be crossed was boggy, it was under observation by enemy machine-gun posts and it gave no cover at all. The assault, however, was supported not only by air bombing but by accurately directed fire from a battery of captured 3.7 howitzers. Having worked their way to the bridge on a two-platoon front, the Levies went over it as if they were tanks instead of infantry. To their astonishment they found themselves, without a single casualty, the possessors of both bridge and town.

The expected counter-attack did not immediately take place. There was trouble only from free-lance snipers while the several columns were moving in to take up their positions for defence.

But a determined counter-attack did come in at 2 o'clock on the morning of the 21st. The enemy had much to help them: they knew the town intimately; they had friends hiding inside; and a counter-attack on Falluja had been the subject of a Tactical Exercise Without Troops skilfully devised for the Iraq Army by a British Military Mission. They now applied what are called the School Solutions, and the School Solutions would have proved correct but for certain interruptions. Of the two light tanks which managed to get into the town one was knocked out by the weapon so much despised by British infantry, the Boyes rifle, while the other remained floundering in a shell-hole, and at the critical moment when the enemy infantry came near the bridge Rab Khamsi Baijan Peki and his Levy platoon attacked them with such ferocity that they were driven right back. A further attack was beaten off by the King's Own, who suffered heavy casualties in this achievement. Thereafter Brigadier Kingstone, who had solutions different from the school ones to this and every other problem, arrived to take command. Sub-units of the Household Cavalry and the Essex Regiment were brought in to reinforce the defence. The knees of certain peaceful male inhabitants of Falluja were examined and were found to be sunburnt, suggesting that these citizens had lately worn the dress of

soldiers; whereupon they were removed. And Falluja had rest, and the advance upon Baghdad could begin.

The plan for taking Baghdad may be regarded, in the broadest terms, as a repetition of the Falluja plan on a far larger scale. What was now called 'Habforce' was divided into two columns, of which one was patiently ferried across the river; again guided by the Arab Legion, it worked its way round by a northern route, and eventually, after an engagement near Taji, came into a position north of Al Kadhimain, a short horse-tram ride north-west of the capital. Meanwhile the southern column, which was to advance on the line of the main road through Falluja, had to get its long train of vehicles across the floods which had earlier given so much trouble to Graham. It was a protracted and exhausting task, but practically the last one. The fort at Khan Nuqta, from which trouble had been expected, surrendered without firing. At the outskirts of Baghdad, after an exchange of artillery fire, a party from the enemy arrived to ask for terms.

A few hours later British officers were in the Embassy, where a house party of some three hundred British and Indians, including twenty women, had been leading with courage and good humour a slightly cramped but excellently ordered life within a circle of hostile machine-guns, with water and electricity still supplied by the enemy, and where, in the gardens, the enterprising traders of the city had been selling tea and sweets, tobacco, cosmetics, and rather faded issues of the *London Evening News*.

There were appalling scenes to follow, when in one night the worst elements of the rebellion had their final fling in the Jewish and residential quarters of Baghdad. But in Habbaniya the Levies Band was playing through the lines. "A sign", said one of their officers, with perhaps a shade of regret, "of impending security."

CHAPTER VIII

MAN AND TASK

THE Rashid Ali rebellion had come rather feebly to its end; three of the traitorous commanders were subsequently tried by the Iraq Courts and, with no murmur of popular disapproval, hanged by the neck. The affair had been so maladroitly timed that the principal actors never arrived to play the parts for which the Wilhelmstrasse had cast them: one, indeed—a son of Field-Marshal von Blomberg—had hurried to Baghdad in a Messerschmitt; but an Iraqi rifleman, more skilled in marksmanship than in aircraft-recognition, had put a bullet through the neck of this officer before he reached the ground. It was not to be assumed, however, because a gang of political racketeers had been thwarted, that Iraq could be pasted over on the military map. The Germans had merely failed, thanks to the impetuosity of their pawns, to secure the country by intrigue; they had yet to throw against it the invincible power of the Wehrmacht. And in the weeks to come, as German troops swarmed over the last, heroic defences of Crete, as German armies surged towards Egypt and into Brest-Litovsk, the peril of Iraq rapidly increased.

That was the real peril which the forces at Basra had to meet.

A small, grey-haired, weather-beaten man had arrived at Basra on May 7th to take over command. This was Lieutenant-General E. P. Quinan, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., who was to inaugurate in Iraq a special tradition of generalship. For the tasks which fell to Paiforce (as this force was afterwards to be called) were never ordinary tasks and the conditions of service in Iraq and Persia were never ordinary conditions. The Command therefore demanded men of something more than conventional abilities, and it was blessed with a succession of Generals of whom each was strikingly individual, each differed as if by a dramatist's design from his predecessor, and each by his peculiar personality made a notable contribution to the character of his command. General Quinan had an intense dislike of the trappings of office. He refused to have a flag on his car, he much preferred to travel without an A.D.C., in church he liked to sit next to sepoys. At a lonely camp an officer would arrive in a trench-coat and ask if anyone could spare him a tent; the residents were startled when their guest came in to supper with crossed swords and crown revealed on his epaulettes. He had a thorough contempt for his own comfort; and this was fortunate, for the job was in no respect a comfortable one.

His original directive, from G.H.Q. India, required him "to develop and organize the port of Basra . . . to enable it to maintain such

forces as may be required to operate in the Middle East, including Egypt, Turkey, Iraq . . ." He was also to ensure the security of all means of communication in Iraq, including aerodromes, and to develop them. These main tasks included the development of lines of communication installations at Baghdad and the development and protection of the lines of communication from Baghdad westward to the frontier of Transjordan and northward to Mosul. Special responsibilities detailed were the protection of R.A.F. installations and personnel at Habbaniya and Shu'aibā, of British subjects in Baghdad and elsewhere, of the Kirkuk oilfields and the pipeline to Haifa. This directive, which went on to envisage further and more remote responsibilities, was more than once varied by subsequent directives. For while British Troops Iraq, as they were then called, were supplied and maintained from India, the area in which they were to serve was within the operational orbit of the Middle East Command, and it was some time before a solution of this dual interest was finally discovered. With or without variation, the directive could have caused a heart-attack in any commander less stoical than the professional, unassuming, uncomplaining soldier who received it.

Mosul—to take one place which the directive brought within his responsibility—is almost exactly as far from Basra as Calais is from Venice. Baghdad is about half-way between the two. Between Basra and Baghdad there was a vast area of semi-liquid mud, from which, as the sun dried it, there would emerge tracks which in many parts were like a ruffled sea, modelled alternately from gypsum and from soft, treacherous sand. There was also a single-line metre-gauge railway, heroically constructed during the previous war and now most effectively cut by the rebels. Alternatively there were the rivers, which had been used in the 1915 campaign for second-line transport, and these were a succession of varying currents and shifting mud-banks which made navigation by the few vessels available exceedingly dangerous and slow. North of Baghdad there were again roads of a primitive order, and another railway-line which went to Syria and Turkey, but this was standard gauge and would therefore not take the metre-gauge rolling-stock. These, expressed laconically, were the conditions to be faced in the planning of a 700-mile movement to Mosul. And in the area of Mosul Quinan was required (as one of his tasks) to establish the foundations not merely of a flying column but of an army, fully provisioned and equipped, which could meet a German force of, say, five divisions, fight them, and go on fighting them till they were beaten.

To such an object a policy of spectacular dash, of racing up troops in penny numbers, would (even if possible) have been irrelevant. A battalion of the Fifth Gurkhas, hard to spare, was indeed flown up to reinforce Habbaniya; but Quinan was obliged to think in larger terms than those of battalions. Fundamentally his whole conception was of

movement. He would not let his forces make themselves at home; they were, he constantly reminded them, an army in transit (exactly as the Ambassador had informed Rashid Ali); their business was to get forward, northward, and get at the Germans, who would not fail on their side to keep the appointment. But while he vigorously maintained this spirit he knew, with a life's experience of soldiering in large countries, that if his force started to tumble over the desert and through the floods like a mothers' outing it would not be a force at all by the time it got to Baghdad. "You may find it convenient", the directive soberly remarked, "to carry out these intentions in the following stages: (a) Occupation and development of Basra as a base for the maintenance of at least three divisions . . . capable of expansion to serve at least six divisions. . . ." It was not only convenient, it was the counsel of necessity.

For the requirements of war had changed. Alexander the Great had to find food and clothing for his troops, fodder for his fighting horses and for the animals of his baggage trains. An army destined to fight the Germans would want more than that. It would want different kinds of food for the different races of its membership, different kinds of clothes for the varying extremes of climate; it would need many thousands of gallons of petrol and oil, to be available at hundreds of depots; many million rounds of ammunition; it would need spare parts for rifles and spare parts for machine-guns, spare parts for heavy artillery and field artillery and anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery, spare parts for tanks and trucks and motor-bicycles, thousands of spare parts methodically stored; it would need locomotives and rolling-stock, cranes and barges; it would require the material, the tools, the equipment, for building roads and railway lines, bridges and hospitals and storerooms; it would need the workshops to maintain and repair all this equipment, the machinery and the dynamos to drive it, the men to work this machinery, and the means to shelter, clothe, feed and train them. In Iraq, except for oil and certain foodstuffs, there were practically none of these; they had to be fetched from somewhere abroad, unloaded, sorted, stored and distributed. And Iraq had, for practical purposes, only one port.

Basra 'City' is a small Arab town, two to three miles from the river bank, of the kind that is wholly and permanently out of bounds to all troops. Its port is Ashar, where there were, in 1941, a busy bazaar, an elementary wharfage surrounded by clustering huts, and a small European trading community. Three miles farther up-river was Maqil, the terminus of the Iraq State Railway. (The accepted Arabic spelling is Ma'qu'il; it derives from the more homely name of a shipping company's manager, Mr. McGill.) Here, besides the air-port where liners touched down on their way to India, and an R.A.F. station, there was a pleasantly pompous Port Directorate building from which

a British company acting for the Iraq Government controlled, with great efficiency, the docks and sidings necessary for handling cased dates, barley in bags, and a comparatively small quantity of general cargo, amounting to a total of some 50,000 tons a month. Behind these buildings was the band of date-palms which form an almost unbroken margin on both sides of the Shatt al Arab river—date-palms which, until 1914, had stood in swamp. Beyond this fringe of palms there was desert, and beyond the desert, more desert, reaching for a thousand miles to the Red Sea. This was the port where all the manifold requirements of a modern army had to be landed, this was the place where the men who handled them would have to keep themselves alive. And at the end of April 1941 all the dock labourers were out on strike.

An Englishman who has known them all his life has said that the people of Basra are the friendliest and kindest in the world. Such evidence, which comes not only from one source, seems more worth accepting than any casual judgment of newcomers. And it may be said, in general terms, that the arrival of British troops found the greater part of Basra's population scared and bewildered rather than hostile. But there were hostile elements, and a little of such goes far. In Baghdad the 'Futwah' organization had run true to the form of its inspirers, proving again that the natural modicum of devilry within the human boy can, with sufficient concentration of evil influence, be turned into gangsterism; these children had become so great a nuisance, molesting Moslems as well as Jews and foreigners, that the Rashid administration had disbanded them. But the place of the Futwah was immediately taken by a society called Katib el Shabab, organized from the ranks of older students, always a fertile soil for political propaganda, and this society was mainly responsible for the orgy which occurred in Baghdad immediately after the armistice. Similar influences were at work in Basra, which like all port towns had its complement of polyglot rascallions and where there was wealth enough in the bazaars of Ashar to feed the widespread human appetite for looting. Indeed, a party from Baghdad were to make a pilgrimage to Basra expressly to put the Ashar rioting on a businesslike footing, but a policeman who knew his world met these gentlemen and sent them back by the next train. Meanwhile, Rashid's army, of which a great part was in the south, had established pickets at the entrances to the R.A.F. compound at Maqil. There was a large contingent in the Jubala barracks, close by, and another at the barracks of Zubair, a few miles to the south-west. The commander of these forces had announced, after the landing of the first brigade from India, that any further landing would be opposed, and though he agreed to withdraw from the district on the 2nd May this undertaking was not fulfilled.

That, described briefly, was the general situation from which Quinan had to start creating the defence of Iraq. And what of his men?

CHAPTER IX

SALUTE TO THE INDIANS

EVERY British soldier who has served in Paiforce will say that any credit for the work accomplished should go to the Indians first of all. The Indians were first in the field. They were always greatly in the majority. They added to their country's tremendous martial reputation a new renown for the ability to learn a hundred trades and for dogged endurance through prolonged and varying hardships.

They were volunteers to the last man. The fighting nucleus, Gurkhas, Pathans, Punjabi, Mussulmans, Sikhs, came from districts where military service is a tradition almost tantamount to a second religion, where in one family the grandfather may be a retired sepoy, the father a retired subahdar, the uncle a serving havildar, and one of the sons an officer holding a British commission. Among these valorous peoples, with their long history of service, the ceremony of admitting a new sepoy to the ranks, after he has passed through his recruit training, is a high and splendid ritual marking the greatest day in a man's life, and to them no profession could ever compare in dignity with the soldier's. But the great gift of its manhood which India made was not derived from the martial races alone. India was ready to find artisans and clerks as well as riflemen, gunners and signalmen. She provided many hundreds of doctors. She found technical and administrative as well as fighting officers, she gave skilled mechanics and railway men and drivers and dockyard operators. Some, townsmen whose civil occupation was similar, came into the army already partly trained; some, inheriting a natural craftsmanship from one of the world's most ancient civilizations, could learn easily the use of complex and delicate tools; but a very great number came from villages so lost in India's huge distances that they had had no contact at all with the world of machinery and traffic. They were peasants whose experience was limited to the few acres of land on which they worked. Their life was almost as simple as human life can be, and often as hard: often squeezed by a permanent poverty, sometimes enclosed in squalor. These were to learn the strictly ordered life of soldiers, the use of brushes, of pull-throughs and oilcans. They were to be taught trades of which they could not imagine the ultimate use. They were to find themselves in bewildering camps and in lighted villages that floated out on the heaving sea, they were to serve in a far and desolate country under men, sometimes, who spoke no word of their tongue. These, the humblest of her sons, were to enlarge the long history of India's military greatness. By their labour and endurance they were to serve mightily not only the

British Commonwealth but alien peoples whose very names they never heard.

If the India Command had had no other theatres to consider, and if the ration of time had been generous, the expeditionary force which it sent to Iraq would have been organized on the accepted lines: long before the first troops were to sail a complete order of battle would have been formulated, staffs would have been detailed and trained specifically for their duties; the whole framework of the new army, measured and tested, would have been moved out like the parts of a prefabricated house. Such plans had, in fact, been put in hand toward the end of 1940 and by July 1941 would have been far enough developed to cope with an emergency in the Iraq area. If the timing of the Germans had worked out accurately (and at that stage it was, after all, their war) July 1941 would probably have been exactly the right date: in moving too soon for the Germans, Rashid Ali very nearly moved too soon for the British as well. When the emergency actually came in April 1941 India's resources were almost totally committed: she had lavishly supplied men and materials to East Africa; the Middle East was incessantly hungry for reinforcements; the threat of action by Japan, which was of peculiar concern to India, already demanded large reinforcement of the eastern outposts. The best that could be done for Iraq was a hand-to-mouth policy for units, specialists and supplies.

It has been seen that the first troops of all were diverted from Malaya. No other units were ready.

At the end of April 1941 the 17th Indian Infantry Brigade, consisting of the 1/12 Frontier Force Regiment, the 5/13 Frontier Force Rifles, the 1/5 Royal Gurkha Rifles and a Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, was in a comparatively early stage in a programme of progressive training. The officers were mounted on horses, mules were used for machine-guns. Motor transport had started to arrive and men were hastily being taught to drive it when orders were received for movement in twenty-four days to an unknown destination. Nominally, these units were already mobilized; this meant, in fact, that they had moved under canvas. A unit is said to be mobilized when it has drawn its wartime scale of equipment; but the equipment was not there to be drawn. Field mess equipment, Brens and carriers arrived a few days before the units moved, and in the 1/12 Frontier Force Regiment the one man who knew how to drive a carrier started frantically to instruct a dozen others. Pistols were issued to officers on the very day of leaving. As the troopships bore this impromptu fighting-force through the tail of the monsoon, those sepoys who had got their stomachs under control crowded round the Brens which their havildars were gingerly stripping. An Intelligence officer, mastering his nausea, collected a squad of lance-naiks and gave them further lessons in reading the maps of India, happily supposing that there would be maps of equal accuracy

in the country of their destination. Ahead, in another ship, a party of two officers and twenty-five other ranks were wondering with some pessimism what was happening to their baggage, which after the fashion of baggage had wandered off on its own at Bombay. They also wondered how their work was to be conducted in whatever country they came to; for these were the first detachment of Second Echelon, and, as they afterwards admitted, they "had little knowledge of what a Second Echelon was supposed to do". Some days behind them came an Engineer Base Workshops Company, men who looked and drilled like sepoys: some of whom, a few weeks before, had never worn boots, had never travelled twenty miles from the village where they were born, and when first taught to march swung both arms in the same direction. The officers were told, in the later days of the voyage, that they were to land in the last war's Mesopotamia and must expect to be fired on as they landed. They rather hoped that this wouldn't happen, for their men had nothing at all with which to fire back.

Bewildered, seasick, and not a little apprehensive, this hastily gathered caravan of all the military talents sailed in detachments towards the Persian Gulf: seasoned fighting men and recruits hardly broken to their harness; tea planters hastily turned soldier, anxious subalterns newly out from England, earnest doctors fresh hatched from the Osmania College at Hyderabad; technical units officered by officials of the Calcutta tramways, tradesmen from the Punjab, novice drivers from the uplands of Mysore. And as they moved slowly up the Shatt al Arab, past the interminable wall of date-palms, men in New Delhi and Cairo, in Edinburgh and London, were talking urgently on the green security telephones.

"... an expert in railway traffic management. Better if he knew some Urdu ..."

"... know as well as you do that they're earmarked. But somehow or other we've got to snaffle an L. of C. Signals unit ..."

From these threads and patches an army had to create itself: an army that could stand against the mounted fury of Hitler's eastern ambitions. The thing could only be done by an inherited disbelief in the possibility of failure; and it did not look as if there would be any time to play with.

CHAPTER X

"THE HUGE UNPLEASANTNESS OF LIVING"

ON the starboard side, as the ships moved slowly through the awkward channel in the Shatt al Arab, the British community of Abadan stood along the Persian bank and cracked the air with cheering. But except for a few prone riflemen tactically disposed by the bollards the decks were empty. For there were other observers: there were Japanese tankers moored on the Persian side, there were German gentlemen paying courtesy visits to neutral warships. These did not cheer: they were content to make scholarly notes in their little books.

In the event, the ships reached Maqil unmolested; the near presence of the six-inch cruiser *Emerald*, with ratings painting her hull almost under the muzzles of Iraqi guns, may have had a sobering effect on trouble-makers. But the scene at the docks was discouraging. Since the railway line to Baghdad had been broken, cargoes for North Iraq and Turkey could not go forward, and these were now piled so high that they hid the godowns. Into this vast congestion the military stores had to be unloaded, and since the coolies were on strike there was no one to unload them. A Docks Operating Group of Madrassi, Bengali and Chittagonians who had received a hasty training at Deolali were working heroically to coax the mill-race into orderly channels. There were helpful officers already ashore, including one who from sheer good nature met every ship at whatever time of day or night it arrived. But thoughtfulness alone will not clear cargoes. There were found, mercifully, two British soldiers who understood the working of cranes, and while these settled down to the practice of their art the officers aboard stripped to the waist and descended to the holds, followed by their men. A ship's hold has a peculiar capacity for producing clammy heat; Basra is one of the hottest places in the world and the second most humid that man inhabits. Here for three, for four, sometimes for five days the soldiers heaved and hoisted the baggage of an army: arms chests, vehicles, guns, cased mortar-bombs. In one of the holds a villainously dirty man, his face and body channelled with sweat, would occasionally put down the crate he was lifting, remove his monocle, polish it on the inside of his stocking, return it gracefully, and in the voice that is generally associated with chota pegs would shout an order to the amateur stevedores on the deck above. He was the Second-in-Command of a Frontier Force battalion. Ashore, the Staff of British Troops Iraq had found two rooms in the Port Club in which to create

order from all the elements of chaos. Round one of these the branches had their tables rim to rim as in a Staff College exercise and took turns to use the single 1917 telephone. In one corner a Brigadier Slim, whose name was not to escape the world's history-books, discussed with some Gunner and Sapper officers the possibility of digging-down the trails of 18-pounder guns to make them fire into the sky; for the Luftwaffe was known to have sent its missionaries to Mosul and there were other hostile aircraft nearer still.

From the time of the first troops' arrival there was a succession of incidents. Hooligans threw a brick into a truck loaded with Gurkhas. (It proved to be unwise to throw bricks at Gurkhas.) Windows were smashed, private cars were attacked, local troops spat from lorries on to a Levy route march. The Prince Regent, who had arrived in Basra, had to be smuggled aboard H.M.S. *Falmouth*, and there was no small difficulty in embarking safely the refugee families from Baghdad. The seeds of disturbance were mainly in Ashar, where the British Consul was at one time locked up in a liquorice factory, and the chief engineer of the Maqil Port Authority would have been treated likewise if he had not produced "a pass from the Government" which was actually a canteen ticket. On the 7th May a detachment of Gurkhas was sent down the river to clear the town. They were supported by mortar crews from the Levies, who, remaining impervious to all the threats and blandishments of the rebels, had already done invaluable work in the Basra neighbourhood, including the occupation of the Port Marine dockyards and the clearance of Zubair barracks. The Ashar expedition was delayed by navigational difficulties (navigation of the Shatt al Arab is seldom free from trouble) and the entry into the town could not be made until first light on the 8th. This was unfortunate, as it caused the police to decamp, and although the awkward task of the expedition was smoothly carried out, with few exchanges of fire, it was followed by an outbreak of looting in which a great part of the bazaar was completely stripped while the shop-owners barricaded themselves in houses in the European quarter. Excited crowds tore everything out of shops and offices alike, strewing the streets with files and ledgers. A day passed before this manifestation wore itself out, after which the troops rounded up and admonished the children naively offering their loot for sale and visited the gaol, where civil prisoners were demanding with some indignation what had happened to their warders. Sporadically, the disorders continued; there were so few troops to spare for civil police duties that a large hospital at Maqil, where a courageous group of Englishwomen were working, was protected by a detachment of field artillery with their guns disposed to fire at point-blank range over open sights. The district was not finally calmed until Shaikh Saleh Bashayan, head of the nobility of Basra, set up a local government and a new mutassarif of high integrity, Abdul Razak Hilmi, was appointed; they

were helped by Judge Lloyd, a wise friend of the Iraqi people, and by Colonel Sargon, who for many years had been implicitly trusted by all classes of the population.

The soldiers collecting themselves and their equipment at Maqil had little time to trouble their thoughts with these disturbances. A sense of insecurity, induced by the sounds of spasmodic rifle-fire or breaking glass, was only a minor element in the huge unpleasantness of living: the heat and flies, the strangeness, the congestion of the wharves, the lack of almost everything which is to be had just round the corner in Catterick or Calcutta, these were the trials that mattered.

The earlier troops went into camp not far from the R.A.F. Station. Later arrivals had to go further inland. From Maqina, close to Maqil, a road of sorts went off south-westwards into the desert and disappeared almost at once under the floods; but this, the knowledgeable said, could be used, and had to be used, because the new high-level road was by no means ready. So those units which had got hold of their transport drove splashing along it, and the rest marched; accompanied, perhaps, by the ghosts of soldiers who had marched this wearisome road some twenty-four years before. The road, when the flood released it, seemed merely to go on and on, and these new soldiers had not yet learnt that this is the way of all roads, where they exist, in Iraq and Persia. It was said to arrive at a place called Shu'aiba, but Shu'aiba, when at last they got there, was not a place at all. There was an R.A.F. Station too far off to be visible and a strip of metre-track which led to a set of railway points grandiloquently known as Shu'aiba Junction. There were a few forts which looked as if they had been run up by the earliest Babylonians; they were, in fact, Turkish forts, and British blood had once been shed to win them. There was a curious mound which had its own immortality, for Wheeler of the Seventh Hariana Lancers had won his V.C. in charging single-handed to attack it. Except for these, Shu'aiba was a name given to an area of sand just high enough to escape the floods.

A young officer, bringing his tired troops to this wilderness, asked where his camp was. An older hand informed him.

"You can draw your tents over there, where you see those lorries. Yes, just about on the horizon. And I should suggest you pitch them over in that direction. You'll find the site has a nice southern aspect. It also has nice eastern, northern and western aspects. Or if you like to go ten miles further over to the right—or to the left—I'm sure nobody will mind. It will mean a little further to go for your rations, that's all. You want to space things out well, unless you happen to have some Bofors guns with you. Don't stint yourselves on space—plenty for all. Protection? Wire? Well, yes, I suppose you could ask Ordnance to indent on Kirkee for a few miles of Dannert wire."

So these men who had been bundled into ships at Bombay started

teaching themselves how to live, or to keep alive, in the Mesopotamian desert: how—without a water supply, without camp furniture, cook-houses or communications, sometimes without tools or transport—to retain the appearance and discipline of well-trained units and to make themselves secure against the risks of banditry; how, with the temperature rising steadily and steeply from 100° in the shade (supposing there had been any shade), to carry on the hundred trades which are required of a modern army. And while they were learning these arts the storms began: a new kind of storm in which flinty sand is driven across the plains by a fifty-mile-an-hour gale, so that midday is turned to Egyptian darkness, while clothes and food and flagellated human bodies become mere reservoirs of sand.

Space in plenty, but never plenty of time. For there were Germans already at Mosul, and in those early days of May the defenders of Habbaniya, four hundred miles away, were fighting with their backs to the wall.

The road to Baghdad was firmly held by Rashid's forces, and officers of the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade who examined their positions from the air reported that they would be difficult to outmanœuvre, since the flood waters reached both margins of the road. Philosophically, the Brigade started to practise the execution of infantry tactics in boats. An armoured train had been captured and by violent exertions put into good repair; with this the reopening of the railway line grew feasible, the train being used to cover repair parties as they worked their way forward. Meanwhile, a minor army of sweating tradesmen laboured day and night to prepare the 'Tigris Regatta'. Aged river steamers, mihailas (Arab barges), almost everything that could float was collected; even an antique paddle-boat which the Royal Engineers had used as annexe to their Mess was brought into service. (The Sappers wept to see it go, but were captivated by the spectacle of the wheels turning.) With the help of the Royal Navy, these craft were patched, decked, and adapted with all the resources of a makeshift workshop and inventive wits. The guns and transports of 21 Brigade with its supporting arms were coaxed aboard them, with petrol, food, thirty-two tons of ice and a field bakery, while the Levies mounted three-inch mortars on the *Yarra*. On 12th June, with a naval escort and with a port-side flank protection of R.A.F. armoured cars wriggling their way through the palm groves, this unusual flotilla set sail for the ill-omened city of Kut. The 21st Brigade had got through to Baghdad by land on the same day, and four days later a detachment from 21 Brigade was advancing to Baghdad by rail.

By then the news was through: the armistice had been signed. So they would have an extra three or four hundred miles to cover before they reached their war, unless the Germans moved fast to meet them. The goal now was Mosul; and beyond Mosul, Syria, where the

" THE HUGE UNPLEASANTNESS OF LIVING "

Germans had pleasantly arranged for other people to fight the German battle. This side of Baghdad there would be no shooting, though a bomb or two might fall. Time was the immediate enemy again, with its faithful allies, distance and the murderous heat of the sun.

CHAPTER XI

THE SYRIAN EXCURSION

THE Regent returned to Baghdad on the 1st June. The immediate task, now, was to establish, at all the main centres of Iraq, forces which could keep the country in peace and security while the fabric of its government was repaired and while preparations were made to deal with the northern threat. These centres were temporarily protected by detachments from Habforce, which Middle East Headquarters required to be relieved.

Later, the Base Ordnance Depot at Shu'aiba was to display the notice beloved of Ordnance officers: "*The impossible we do at once. Miracles take a little longer*". This might well have been the motto for the whole of what was then 'Force Iraq'. In that spirit it was decided that troops should be in the required positions by the 18th June.

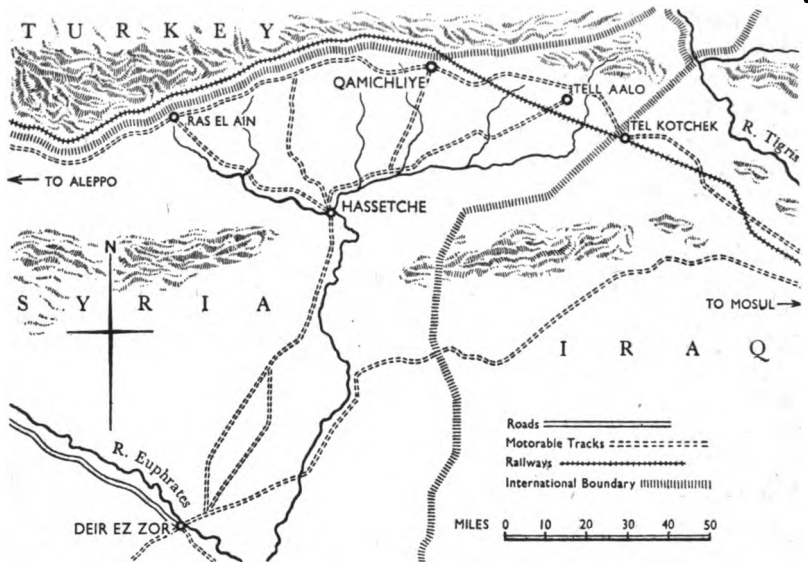
This excellent ambition would have been feasible if something like the normal conditions of military operation had been granted: an adequate provision of troops; a secure base, plentifully supplied, with stores and workshops in good running order; weather not too severe to allow movement with tolerable hardship at any hour of the day; reliable railways or, failing railways, roads sound enough to take military traffic at operational speeds; a sufficiency of mobile maintenance equipment; a system of communications; the elements of a Lines of Communication organization. The actual circumstances were a shortage of fighting troops and of ancillary troops in every department; absence or severe shortage of every kind of equipment; weather in which the inhabitants of the country for generations thought it abject lunacy to work or move after 11 o'clock in the morning. A part of the force was pressing forward over a single track, as long as the road from London to Edinburgh, with floods on both sides and the constant likelihood of ambush by guerillas. A part was moving in parallel by the lately sabotaged and still dubious metre-gauge railway. A part, crazily mounted with its weapons and transport on ancient boats and Victorian paddle-steamers, was winding through the unpredictable channels of the Tigris. The modest complement of vehicles on which these forces relied had springs and axles suitable for proper roads or for tracks which are generally held to be negotiable by armies; they were expected by the manufacturers to be within a day or two's reach of spare parts; they included the armoured cars of the 13th Lancers of which the engines were five years old and the bodies twenty. For communications they had, in all, three miles of cable. Civil communications between the main towns consisted of one pair of copper wires

for speech and one single iron wire for messages. Brigades had a few wireless sets which could be lent to battalions for emergency, but no one borrowed them because in the conditions prevailing they did not work. Maps were such that some supply vehicles aiming for Deir ez Zor found themselves on the way to Haifa. The base, soon some hundreds of miles behind, was a sprawl of tents and of men struggling heroically to live and work in the desert of Shu'aiba. The total distance to be covered to the several destinations was about 3,300 miles. The shade temperature in most of Iraq was nearing 120 degrees.

Yet it was done. As early as the 3rd June the indomitable survivors of the King's Own struggled through by land to Mosul, while the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Gurkha Rifles followed by air. (There they found German aircraft, ready for bombing, with the swastikas painted out, and saw the Germans themselves departing on the Taurus Express.) By the 18th June, when General Quinan assumed command of all British forces in Iraq, the Headquarters of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade was in Mosul, and the 2nd Battalion of the 7th Gurkha Rifles was guarding the oilfield at Kirkuk. At Baghdad the Headquarters of the 10th Indian Division had been established, with the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles, the 3rd Battalion of the 11th Sikh Regiment, two field regiments of the Royal Artillery and a battery of the 1st Indian Anti-Tank Regiment. The 2nd Battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles had detachments at Haditha, Rutba and Falluja. The 21st Indian Infantry Brigade were at Kut. At Shu'aiba there remained the 25th and 17th Indian Infantry Brigades, each short of one battalion, and the 19th Medium Battery of the Royal Artillery. Another Battalion was protecting the Lines of Communication to Baghdad and a further Indian Infantry Brigade had begun to land at Basra. With every circumstance against him, without flurry but at almost unbelievable speed, Quinan was executing the terms of his directive.

The first stage had been achieved, and from now on work would have been a little easier if the force could have concentrated on tidying and strengthening its positions. But the breathing space was not granted. It would have been a waste of labour, and ultimately of lives, to build up a system of defence in Iraq while the Axis powers, unhampered, established powerful bases in Syria, two hours' flying distance from Baghdad itself. And this is what the Axis powers were doing.

Events in Iraq had made it fully clear what significance might be given to the presence of the Vichy French in Syria and the Lebanon. Moreover, German control of this region would threaten the encirclement of Turkey. Early in June Imperial and Free French Forces, under General Maitland Wilson, began their march from Palestine. The main thrust was up the coast towards Beirut. But a concerted advance from the east was also in the plan, and General Quinan had his directive. Immediately on its release from garrison duties in Iraq the



AREA OF THE SYRIAN CAMPAIGN

hardened force which had made the accomplished move from Palestine turned westwards again, with Palmyra as its principal objective. On the 17th June Quinan was asked to find two infantry brigade groups for action in Syria, and on the 22nd June he was required to rush troops to Deir ez Zor, a Syrian town on the Euphrates some 250 miles north-east of Baghdad. "This was not easy", he afterwards remarked.

The central problem, as in all military operations over great distances, was the movement of supplies. A unit running short of mortar bombs in Syria could not send back to Basra for new ones. It could not even send back to Baghdad. Within a reasonably short distance of the battlefield (which would move steadily further from the ultimate source of supply) there had to be dumps sufficiently well stocked to deal with all the emergencies of war. Mosul and Haditha, which was on the way to Deir ez Zor, were the places actually chosen. The stocking and incessant replenishment of these dumps meant transport; in practice, motor transport, since the available railway facilities were quite unequal to the demands of a military campaign in addition to those for which they served in normal times. Of motor transport there was a desperate shortage. Only one and a half General Purposes Transport companies were available, giving a maximum of 220 load-carrying vehicles. As many vehicles as possible were hired locally, but this was not a large or satisfactory contribution, since local vehicles were kept in motion rather more by freaks of fortune than by any recognized principles of engineering. The G.P.T. drivers were ready—and proved

it—to run their lorries without the smallest regard for their own well-being. In every extreme of temperature (to which was added the heat of high-powered engines) and in blinding sandstorms they would cheerfully drive over roads varying from bad to non-existent for as many hours a day as the job required on seven days in the week. It was war, and the only limit was crippling exhaustion. But where men's wills are unlimited the power of machines is not.

The Army has a scientifically planned and tested system for maintaining its vehicles under operational conditions. It is in some ways similar to the system of handling human casualties. Certain repairs are done by drivers; some are done by Light Aid detachments which travel with convoys; more serious defects are dealt with by mobile workshop companies and the worst of all go back to base workshops. In Iraq this organization was only in the earliest stage of building, and in consequence each rung in the repair ladder had to take on jobs which would normally have gone at least one rung further down: with their own skill and with such tools as they had, men did work which really needed machine tools and benches; in makeshift workshops mechanics were handling repairs for which in normal times they would have required something like a factory. In all these conditions the need for spare parts far exceeded the most liberal of calculations: and spare parts which could not be acquired for love or baksheesh from local garages had ultimately to come from India. There was grave shortage even of the normal equipment of tools and spares which a vehicle carries; for, in the scurry and congestion at Bombay, many vehicles awaiting shipment had perforce been left unattended, and persons of enterprise had taken every single removable object into their own permanent custody.

Somehow the wheels had to go on turning. Behind the strange and daring campaign in Syria there is a complex picture of men's activity spread over a thousand miles: a harassed Yorkshireman hunting for tools in the bazaars of Basra; men from Ambala and Siddipett performing, in the milky light of a hurricane lamp, surgery on the buckled chassis of a Studebaker; patched lorries bumping over sleepers on the Samawa railway bridge; a boy from Sukkur who fights to keep awake as his ten-ton Mack Diesel heaves and rattles along the sand-swept Haditha road. On these many human strands, stretched to the limit, the success of the campaign depended. They did not break.

The essence of the campaign was tragedy, for in fighting their enemies the British were forced to fight also men who had been their friends. There were, among the French in Syria, many whose sense of duty was bound up with historic loyalties: there was the French captain with a British ribbon who came out to meet the Frontier Force Rifles. "I fought beside you in the last war", he said, "and I shall not fight against you in this. *Pour moi, je dis que jamais, jamais !*" And in the onward march he gave the Indians valuable help. There were

others, living far from the main stream of the world's intelligence, who mistook the mouthings of Vichy for the voice of France. Such men could have helped materially to surrender the world to fascist dictatorship, and it was the mournful but unmistakable business of the British and Indians to fight them. Yet for all the tragedy which underlay it, for all its sufferings, some of those who took part in this minor war remember it chiefly for being picturesque.

The eastern defences of Syria were formed by a system of Turkish forts, now occupied by Syrian *Légionnaires* under French officers who were mostly veterans. Some were as much as forty miles from the nearest vestiges of civilization, and drew their water from a single brackish well. So romantic was the appearance of these battlemented castles, so remote from contemporary ideas of fortification, that a young officer was ready to swear they had been built by a film company to the designs of P. C. Wren. But in fact their mud-brick walls were in places twelve feet thick, and though none of their equipment was of later date than 1919 there was abundance of it: Hotchkiss and light machine-guns, mortars, rifles, carbines and revolvers; a plentiful reserve of ammunition for all these weapons and a large supply of grenades. Such a fortress could not hold out for long against any considerable force with up-to-date equipment, but such a force the little, struggling army in Iraq could not immediately supply.

The forts were taken, in fact, mainly by a species of reckless confidence. As soon as it was relieved of garrison duty, a column from the 1st Battalion of the 12th Frontier Force Regiment moved forward almost gaily from Mosul; for Mosul is a place where religious fervour can raise alarmingly the political temperature, and it was not then a comfortable station for foreign soldiers. They had with them one section of the 3rd Field Regiment (which could deploy two 25-pounder guns) and an armoured wing consisting of exactly three R.A.F. armoured cars a little past their fifteenth birthday. The cars proved the most valuable element in the attack. Despite their antiquity the Rolls-Royce engines would effortlessly send them cavorting over the desert at seventy miles an hour as long as petrol was forthcoming; at such a speed the sand they churned into the air became a cloud which covered acres, and the watchers from the forts could be forgiven for thinking that at least a squadron of tanks was rushing towards them. If the defenders had been under orders to fight against Germans there can be no doubt that they would have resisted with limitless fortitude. Against the enemies of Germany they made only a small show of resistance. Tel Kotchek was the first to fall and Tell Aalo soon followed.

There were, however, exceptions. One of the forts was surrounded by night, and at first light a rather small British major, dapperly turned out, went forward to demand surrender in the finest French at his disposal. In reply, the French Commander appeared on the battle-

ments in scarlet kepi, jack-boots, Sam Browne and sword, and shouting "We fight to the death!" fired his revolver, unsuccessfully, at one of the armoured cars. After some minatory fire from the 25-pounders and small-arms another French officer offered the surrender of the fort and the garrison were given time to leave it. But when the Indian troops entered the Commander reappeared, brandishing his sword and calling "Death and defiance!" until he was skilfully disarmed by a Viceroy's Commissioned Officer. "I was terribly scared", the V.C.O. said afterwards, "that the French gentleman might get hurt."

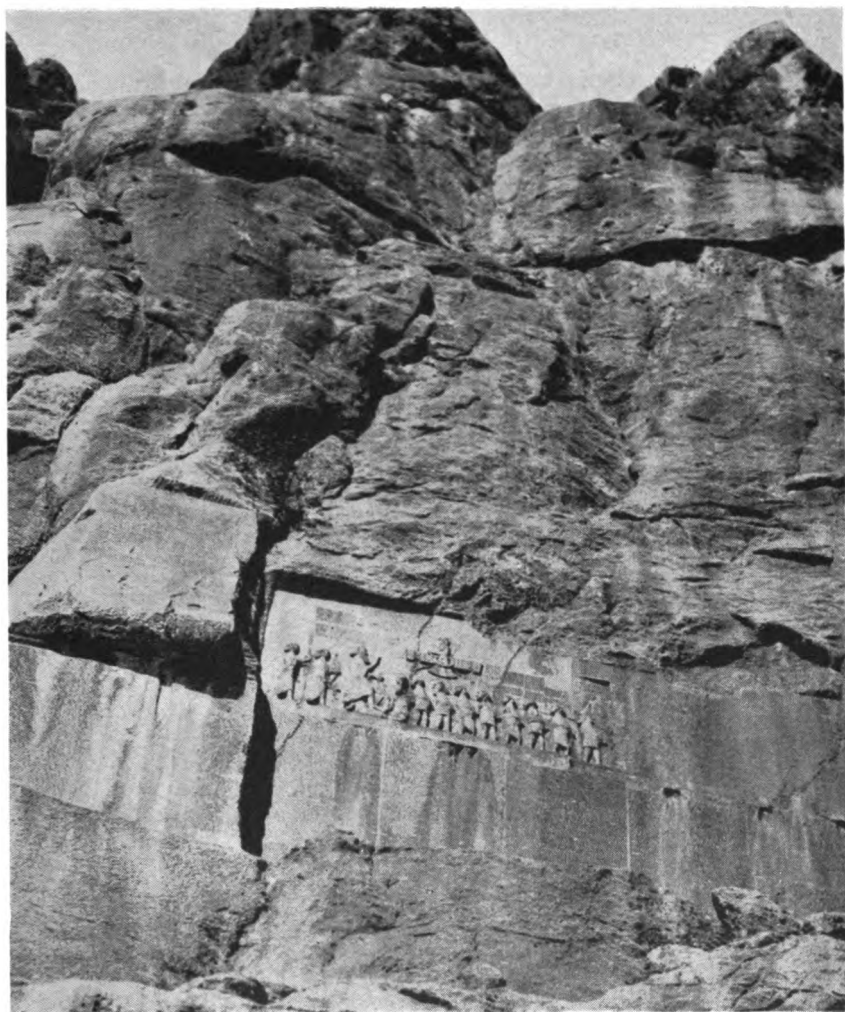
Such episodes, belonging in their nature to older and less desperate wars, did not relieve the commanders from their burden of anxiety. There were several columns engaged, and each was at the limit of its supplies. Over large areas the Axis powers had very great air superiority, and had they decided to reinforce their Syrian commitment by means of the Luftwaffe, the British-Indian columns making this brave display of invincibility would have far overreached their power. As it was, the intention to threaten Aleppo proved very much too large an ambition. Qamichliye was taken and the whole of the railway line as far as the Turkish frontier was then in British hands. Hassetche and Ras el Ain were also occupied and these towns gave control of the whole of the Bec du Canard. But there the advance had to stop. The men could go on; they would have fought their way to the Mediterranean coast. But the food they had to have for rifles and vehicles as well as stomachs could get no farther. To reach these battlefields vehicles had to cross hundreds of miles of desert where there was often not even the roughest track to guide them. Some were permanently lost. There were now nearly four hundred vehicle casualties spread over the desert in the area of operations: a large proportion wrecked by bombs, for the enemy airmen had been neither idle nor incompetent; many with smashed radiators due to collision in sandstorms; a great number with broken front springs. The few recovery lorries available worked frantically to get these cripples back to workshops, captured Vichy lorries rigged with projecting sleepers were ingeniously used to supplement them, and a train of flats sent up the railway came back loaded with wrecks, though no one ever discovered who did the loading. But neither brains nor sweat could defeat indefinitely the rate of loss, and against the loss of vehicles—when the fighting troops had left even their advanced base 400 miles behind—there could be no argument.

Fortunately, the columns which struggled so remotely in the Syrian waste were not fighting a solitary war. After suffering heavy loss the Household Cavalry, with the Wiltshire Yeomanry and the Warwickshire Yeomanry, had thrust their way into Palmyra. Further over, Australians, British, Free French and Indians drove northward up the coastal strip, and on to Aleppo and Damascus, while ships of the British Navy moved steadily upon the flank of their advance and

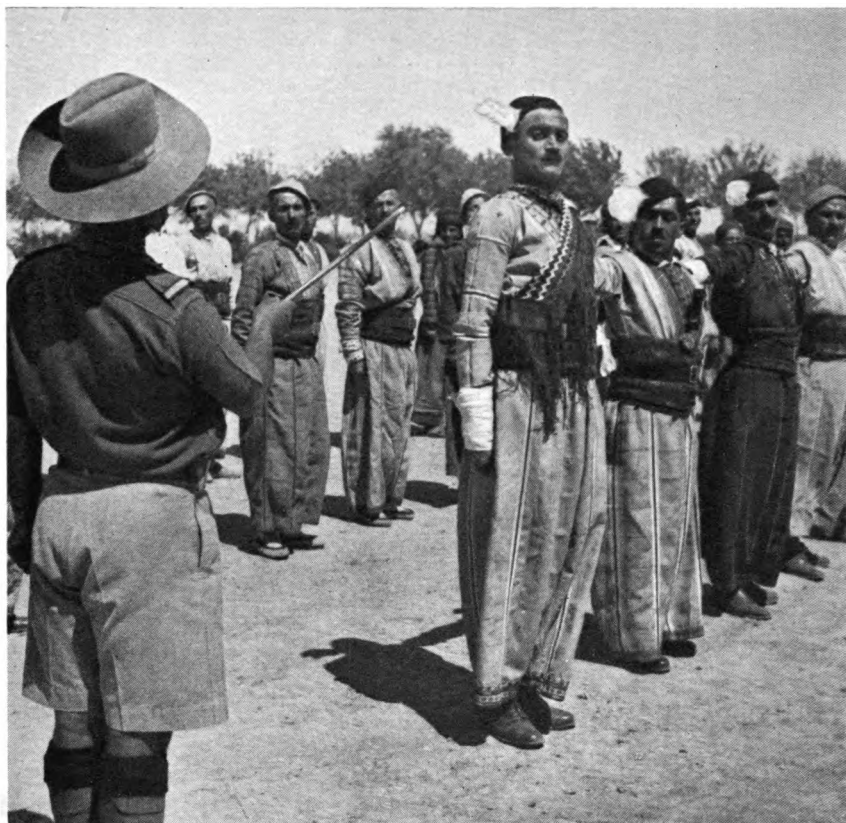
PAIFORCE

Beaufacters and Tomahawks swooped down upon the Vichy landing-grounds. By 12th July delegates from the two sides were meeting at Acre to bury the odoriferous remains of the German Syrian plan.

Breathing space: but it was not to last. A few days after the armistice a revised directive to General Quinan from India was on its way.



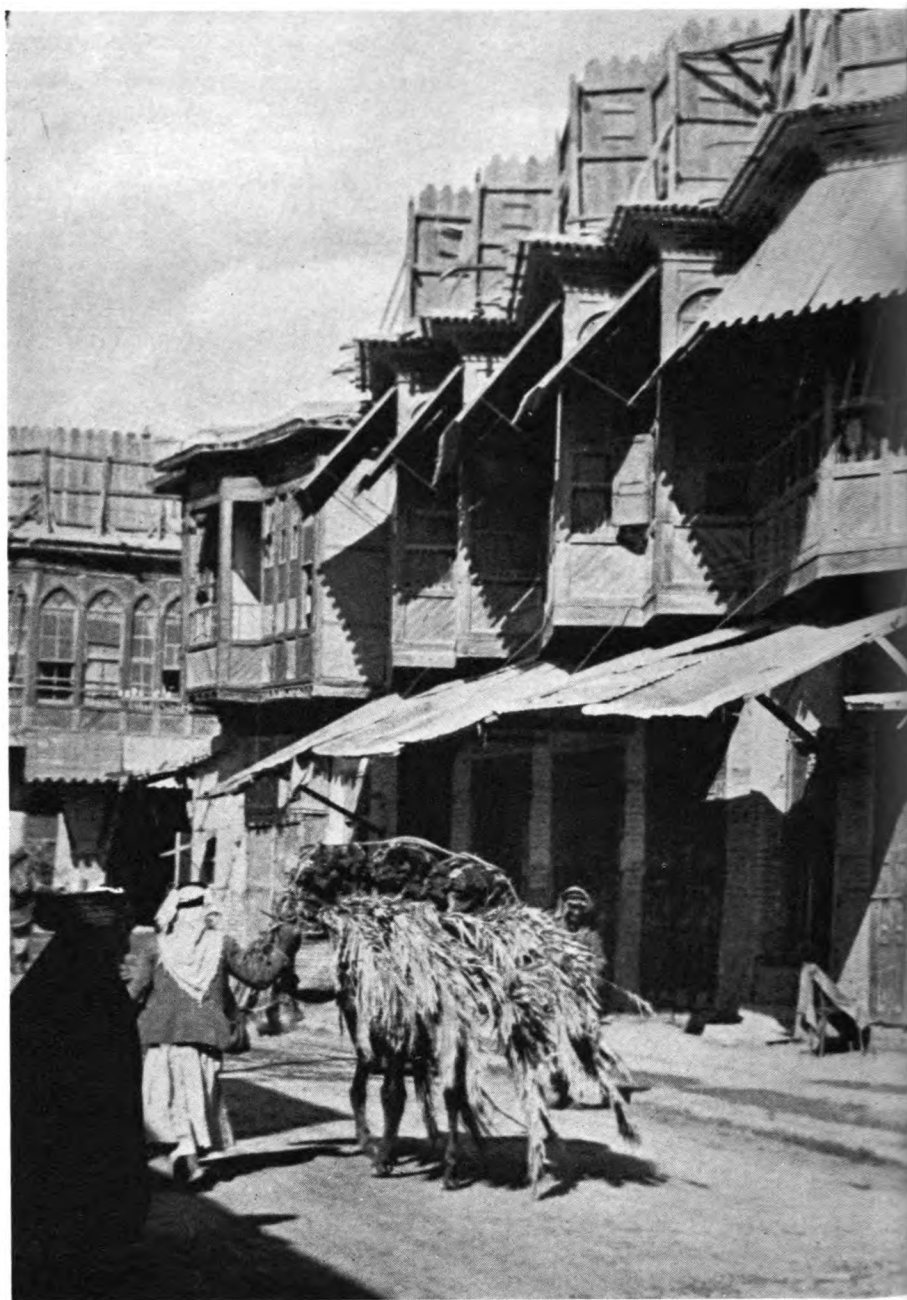
A record of earlier days and simpler wars. The rocks of Bisitun, near Hammadan, where Darius, the Old Testament conqueror, carved the story of his triumphs.



R.A.F. Levies in training at Habbaniya. Formed in the days of the first World War, the Levies once again played a notable part in the defence of their country.



Modern equipment takes the place of tribal dress. The Levies were distinguished for the smartness of their drill as well as for their great qualities as fighting men.



A street in Basra; With its nearby ports of Ashar and Maqil, this small Arab town was



surrounded by a great organization for supplying Paiforce and taking aid to Russia.



By courtesy of the Government of Iraq

Preparing for the invasion which never came. Hundreds of tons of concrete were used for strong points in Northern Iraq. Indian engineers operated these mixers.



Tea and sugar secure the good will of Persian tribesmen. There are tribes who, in their migratory seasons, will commit murder to acquire these commodities.



Merely a matter of routine. To keep the signal routes open from Cairo to Tehran, men from Britain and the plains of India had to live in this frozen world.

CHAPTER XII

BATTLE BEHIND THE BATTLE

"It is very necessary to attend to all this detail, and to trace a biscuit from Lisbon into a man's mouth on the frontier, and to provide for its removal from place to place, by land or by water, or no military operations can be carried on."

THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON.

SYRIA'S return to health had removed an immediate danger. Other dangers were growing. On the 22nd June the Germans had swarmed over the Russian border, they were already in Bessarabia, and there was no sign that their pace would slacken. It was much more than a possibility that the invading army would wheel right between the Black Sea and the Caspian, drive through north-west Persia and invade Iraq from the north-east. Alternatively, since they had signed a pact of friendship with Turkey on the 19th June, the Germans might come to Iraq through Anatolia. General Quinan was now required to make preparations to meet both these threats, and he was to prepare for the maintenance of ten divisions, including some armoured divisions, and thirty R.A.F. squadrons in Iraq. Ten divisions: originally he had only to prepare for three.

An infantry division consists normally of three infantry brigades and ancillary arms—Artillery, Engineers, etc. An infantry brigade has three battalions and ancillary arms. A battalion has approximately 800 men of all ranks. To keep ten divisions fighting for three months it may be reckoned, in round figures, that thirty thousand tons of ammunition are required for artillery (including anti-aircraft artillery), and small-arms; three thousand six hundred tons of mines and grenades will be wanted; one thousand five hundred tons of Engineers' explosives: a total of about thirty-five thousand tons. And ammunition is only one thing that armies require.

When an expeditionary force goes into a new theatre it carries with it, or has carried immediately in rear, all its requirements for a certain period—generally 60 or 90 days. But as it goes forward a system of supplies must be formed behind. One big base depot will not suffice, for this would mean that, at a certain stage, fighting troops would have to send back scores or even hundreds of miles for their smallest requirements. In practice, the various services responsible for keeping an army supplied with the materials of war, with petrol, oil and lubricants, with food, clothing and other necessities, effect delivery through a scientifically ordered chain of depots, advanced depots, sub-depots, 'detail

issue ' depots. Likewise reinforcements, the handling of casualties, the recovery of vehicles are organized each on a chain system. The systems of the various services differ a little, but they are intermeshed to use trunk lines of transport, and at each stage in the chain the depots are grouped in areas or sub-areas for administration and protection. The whole organization is known as the Lines of Communication. It is the practice at staff colleges to show each of the supply systems, such as the system for petrol supply, in turn by laying little notice-boards on a huge floor and connecting them with a maze of coloured ribbons. It is said that a demonstrator once lost his way between ' Railhead ' and ' Bulk Breaking Point ', became entangled in the ribbons and burst into tears. To lay out a Line of Communication across a desert the length of Italy is more awkward still.

All the men employed on a Line of Communication form in themselves a large army which must be prepared, should the enemy work round the flank of the forward troops, to fight. These men must therefore have weapons and ammunition of their own, as well as food, clothes, water, shelter. They are soldiers, and prepared to live as rough a life as the fighting men they support; but a man whose business is to look after thousands of pieces of paper—paper on which depends spare wheels and ammunition and anti-tetanus serum and soldiers' lives—will do his work better if he has something to sit on, something to write at, something to keep things in. He will also be more efficient (though there are soldiers of an older school who shake their heads over the doctrine) if he can sometimes get out of the wind or sun and listen to a gramophone. If his job is to care for the health of machines he will want a more elaborate frame for his working life. Indian mechanics can do many complicated jobs without benches, but British mechanics as a rule cannot. Sandstorms through which men can live will end the life of motor-cycle engines and radar instruments in a few hours unless these are securely housed while the mechanics work on them. So there must be soldiers to design buildings and erect them, and they, in their turn, must have the apparatus for keeping alive and for efficient labour. In this way the requirements of an army multiply.

It was Major-General G. de la P. Beresford, C.B., M.C., who, as G.O.C. Lines of Communication, was given the hardly enviable task of applying these principles in Iraq.

The problems of Iraq had nearly all been foreseen, and the solutions had been worked out in advance as far as that is ever possible. Officers responsible for the supply of materials and equipment were given before they sailed a small encyclopedia of instructions on such diverse subjects as fire precautions, pay, protection against gas, censorship, the destruction of faulty ammunition. " When stores plus dues in fall to the 1st P.A.F. the stock group will report the item concerned to D.A.D.O.S.P." Such mysterious admonitions, which to the ordnance

officer read like poetry, were preceded by unvarnished statements on what lay ahead. "The climate is probably the worst in the whole world. . . . If no covered accommodation is provided, and this will be a physical impossibility in the early stages, the difficulties indicated will be correspondingly increased. . . . Facilities will not be available to provide water for fire-fighting. . . . Local thieves are recognized as superior to those of the North-West Frontier of India. . . . Local resources are practically nil. . . . The site at Maqina, if used, will prove a nightmare. . . ." Other experts had considered in detail what would be necessary to feed British troops, Hindu Indian troops and Moslem Indian troops; Arab and Persian labourers, Kurdish, Armenian, Jewish, Syrian, Turcoman, Sabeen and Yazidi labourers, as well as the population at large (for with so much use of local transport the feeding of the whole country would become partly a British Army responsibility). The extent of local resources had been examined. Attention had been paid to the question of aerated waters, dhall, bhoosa, firewood, beans, dried (haricot), the size and shape of Iraq sheep, the habits of Transjordanian smugglers and the incidence of piroplasmosis among army mules. It remained to put all this lore into practice.

A great part of the trouble came from the pace at which stores of many kinds arrived. The exertions made by the supply departments in India and the United Kingdom were beyond praise, but the harder and more successfully they worked the greater were the difficulties at the receiving end. Shipload followed shipload at extraordinary speed. Ships had to be discharged with the greatest rapidity, since the Empire from Melbourne to Toronto was shouting for bottoms. Everything had to be cleared through a port designed to serve a pastoral country of fewer than four million inhabitants, and in these circumstances the recognized drill for checking cargoes as they were landed was wholly impracticable. Similarly, rolling-stock was in desperately short supply and it was imperative to tumble the contents out of railway trucks without stopping to do the job methodically. "Get the stuff on the ground" was the working motto: it had to be. And men with a life's experience in the methodical handling of army equipment gave orders accordingly, wondering in odd moments whether they would soon have to report to the psychiatrist.

They felt themselves lucky when stores were unloaded at the right depot. In those early days the Base Ordnance Depot was in two parts, one in some sheds which were available at Maqil and one in the R.A.F. enclosure at Shu'aiba fifteen miles away. In the rush of business some of the traffic clerks were unable to distinguish between these two or to see that the distinction mattered. To add interest to the situation, a Base Ordnance Depot some fifteen hundred miles away, and in another Command, had been given the same number. Clothing arrived at dumps reserved for warlike stores, signalling equipment was found in

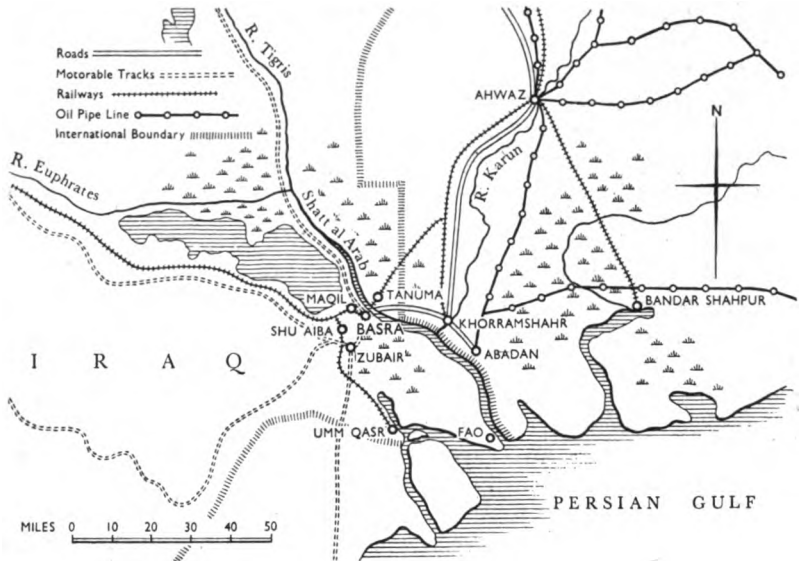
the middle of sandfly-nets, curious objects turned up which no one could identify at all.

With this rapidly growing Irish stew the Indian storemen did their best. Much of the war material they could not recognize; there were new items such as 2-pounder, 40-millimetre and 3.7 anti-aircraft equipments which they had never handled before and for which the identification lists had not arrived. Men used solely to clerking had to act as porters, for in this department no local labour was yet available and there were very few Pioneers to help; neither was there any equipment such as cranes, light railways, or even gravity runways to help in the shifting of heavy crates. Guard duties, again, fell to the same men, and these were no mere formality. In the Basra district there were a great many people whose views on ownership differed from those commonly recommended in British schools, and these would have thought it sinfully wasteful to leave what appeared so great a superfluity to the hazards of moth, rust and weather. Even at a much later date, when the whole stores area had been surrounded by a strong protective fence, small groups intent on minding their own business would enter the enclosure at night, load a trailer with their particular requirements, and pass it through the fence by what the Army calls "brute force and blooming ignorance". In the days before the fence was made, and when no one knew precisely where anything was, the activities of such people presented a problem of notable dimensions. The rule that all open-air work should stop at 11.30 in the morning (a rule which in normal times no sensible person would dream of disregarding in Basra summer weather) had to be given up. Everyone worked from 6.30 a.m. till 2.30 p.m., though no metals could be touched in the open after 10.30 in the morning. Since the job still outpaced them they worked, by the light of hurricane lamps, through the night. It was at least a way of occupying their 'spare time', for the tents were too hot to sleep in and in Shu'aiba in 1941 there was nothing else to do.

The Indians at the ammunition depot had little troubles of their own. Ammunition is kittle cattle, and the Army manual *Magazine Regulations, Part II* formulates wise laws for handling it. In accordance with these laws the depot staff at Shu'aiba, having chosen a suitable three square miles of desert, dug trenches for storage, and when the trenches were eight feet deep they were found to be half full of water, seepage from the Hammar Lake near by. New 'pits' had then to be constructed above ground with double walls of sandbags six feet in height, tarpaulin covers, and traverses of sand. The building of well-knit sandbag walls is not a trivial job; the men who did it were the men also engaged on unloading, and 10 per cent of the strength which should have been available were in hospital with dysentery. It was not till some months after the foundation of the depot that local labour was used in the hand-

ling of ammunition: by then the depot staff knew which kinds of ammunition were in local demand—they included rifle cartridges, for deciding tribal arguments, and No. 36 grenades, used rather unsportingly for fishing—and these could be segregated for security. Not far away, the Indian staffs of the Transportation Stores and Engineer Stores Base Depots were coping with no smaller difficulties. It was the business of the Engineer Stores Depot to handle materials for building huts, workshops, bridges, and defence works: nearly every item, in fact, that a civil builder requires every day and a great number of special items used by Army engineers, as well as the complex and delicate stores used to establish electricity and water supplies. These stores, too, were arriving in wagons which had to be cleared immediately; the number of wagons was to increase to 450 in one day, representing about 4,000 tons; and this ruthless flow of valuable material had somehow to be sorted, stacked and ledgered by staffs among whom few had had any considerable experience of military stores-management. It was hardly surprising, especially at a time when the unit was changing over from the Indian to the British system of stores accountancy, that, for instance, a consignment of spiral springs should have been entered as "Screw Pickets". These harassed and overloaded storemen, who originally numbered 229 Other Ranks, had somehow to direct the labours of nearly 1,200 coolies who were employed as loaders, and since there were found among these loaders completely crippled men, and totally blind men being led about by very small boys, their direction called for patience of an unusual kind.

Men can exist and work prodigiously for a long time when they lack nearly all of what are usually considered the necessities of human life. But they cannot exist without drinking-water and food. No. 1 Engineer Base Workshops Company, consisting largely of very raw recruits, were hardly ashore when they were required to lay an eight-inch water pipeline from the R.A.F. compound at Maqil across the desert to Shu'aiba, a distance of fifteen miles. Sections of pipe were arriving a few at a time. Each join required one pound of yarn and twelve pounds of lead. Neither yarn nor lead was available; there was nothing like the necessary equipment of tools. *The impossible we do at once. Miracles take a little longer.* The commander of the unit, (then) Major Adcock, started to comb the bazaars, buying out of his own pocket every appropriate tool he could see and trusting that the Army would refund the money (which the Army did). He discovered the shipping firm of Gray Mackenzie, who were ready to supply everything they had exactly as if their sole business was to keep the Army on its feet. He discovered also Captain John Morris, the Chief Engineer of the Port of Maqil. Captain Morris had been in the Navy, the Army, and the Air Force. He had lived in Iraq so long that he thought the climate almost delightful. As his work, at this time, occupied only eighteen hours of



BASE AREA

his day, he filled in the odd moments by resurrecting a moribund English newspaper, relaying to the editor all the B.B.C. news and writing the leading articles. Morris, like Adcock, was unable to see that there was anything which could not be done. He lent his own tools, all the suitable stores he could find, even his own skilled tradesmen. The task of laying seven hundred tons of pipe (with twenty tons of lead) went ahead, the men working from five o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon and camping at the point the pipe had reached. The shifting camp grew till it contained 1,350 men—Sikhs, Madrassi, Punjabi, Iraqi: all these had to be catered for, with separate cooking for the Hindus and Moslems. The shade temperature rose to 128° and Adcock one morning found himself unable to get up off the ground. In four days he was on his feet again, hunting for tools, settling a dispute among the coolies, chasing rations, directing the building of a new pump-house and an overhead tank to hold twenty thousand gallons. In twenty-five working days the whole job was done.

Food, meanwhile, was arriving. To the 109 men who, at the beginning, were all there were to handle it, it seemed that almost too much was arriving. It is hard to see what they would have done without the help of the R.A.F., who at Maqil and subsequently at all their stations gave the Army the freest use of everything they had, including such installations as bakeries and butcheries; while the Army, in return, played its part in the feeding of the beleaguered garrison at Habbaniya, and afterwards in developing the huge supply of aviation

petrol which the R.A.F. needed. The storage accommodation which the R.I.A.S.C. half-company had to start with consisted of "a pseudo Base Supply Depot" near Maqil docks and at Shu'aiba the usual strip of sand on to which the supplies were dumped from the impatient trucks. The shortage of motor transport was almost desperate. Storemen who had worked only in peacetime-basis establishments sorted the commodities as best they could, making a stack of Champion sausages and labelling it 'Champagne'. Simultaneously an officer was detailed to look after Local Purchase, and he, having no experience of these functions, discovered with some alarm that the prices of milk, butter, eggs and meat had risen (from the moment when the troopships were sighted) to many times the normal scale. At the head of the supplies department in a division there is normally a Colonel known as the C.R.A.S.C. (Commander, Royal Army Service Corps). Here, in the earliest days, the functions of C.R.A.S.C. had to be carried out by the commander of the Indian Supply Personnel Company, who used his four British company officers as staff officers. The same four officers, with two V.C.O.s, had also to look after the base supply depot (which consisted then of stacks of commodities placed, for security against air attacks, 200 yards apart in the desert); the several Detail Issue Depots responsible for distributing food among hundreds of scattered units gradually extending northward over 300 miles of desert; static and mobile petrol installations; and, presently, a railhead supply detachment at Baghdad. Brigadier Hickie, who shortly arrived as Deputy Director of Supplies and Transport, had two separate problems to handle simultaneously. He had, first, to ensure that all the units got fed from day to day (and more of them were arriving daily), and he had also to lay the foundations of a system which would feed a large army (and its motor transport) operating hundreds of miles from Basra in the north of Iraq. The two tasks conflicted, but somehow the troops were always fed: the men sweating in the docks and on the railway-sidings, the Sikhs and Madrassi on the pipeline, the Punjabi in the Army Post Office, the Indian Pioneers heaving ammunition cases at the Base Ordnance Depot, the Italians building sheds. So, also, were the Ashari labourers who arrived in lorryloads at the depot sites, the swarming multitude in the coolie camps, and so, later on, were thousands of civilians in Baghdad and Mosul, in Ramadi and Kirkuk. There was another vast hunger to be satisfied, that of vehicles, moving farther and farther from the base, for petrol and oil. With the unlimited help of the Rafidain Oil Company's officials this hunger, too, was constantly relieved.

The size of the base steadily increased. It was to spread, at last, over an area larger than Egypt. And simultaneously the centre of gravity moved forward. Depots were opening in and about Baghdad, at Haditha, at Kirkuk, as far as Mosul. The distance of these depots from

the base was too great and an advanced base had to be started. A place called Musaiyib was chosen. It was some forty miles south of Baghdad, not far from ancient Babylon, and provided seven miles square of good surface not liable to flood. Here it was planned to set up, among other establishments, an advanced base workshop, advanced ordnance and ammunition depots, a reinforcement camp and two hospitals. The work of construction began.

It was Shu'aiba over again. A party of English electricians and bank clerks, Scottish students and shop assistants, a professional architect or two among them, arrived in mid-desert with a contingent of Indians whose languages hardly one of them understood. The point at which they were to draw rations was forty miles away. They put up their tents and constructed the bare essentials of living, rough cook-houses and latrines: their business was not to make their own lives endurable but to put up buildings where men could be finally equipped for battle, where thousands of tons of ammunition could be kept safe and ready for the guns. And time was chasing them: the panzer-truppen were driving towards the heart of Russia at a pace undreamed of in older wars; if the British were not ready in Iraq there would be no second chance. Reveille was at 3.45 in the morning. Work began at 4.15.

The army of workers grew almost uncannily. The shaikhs, who treasured photographs of themselves arm-linked with last-war British soldiers, were unstinting in their helpfulness; they picked the most reliable men from their tribes as labourers for the British, watched sharply over these men's discipline. But such workers had to be taught, and though the boys of 12 or 13 years were excellent as carpenters, it was hard to make older men see the sense of polished standards. Even the Indian workmen, indefatigable, longing to give of their best, were not always easy to train in European crafts. The curse of language hindered everything. "He's daft!" said a weary corporal from Burslem who had been explaining the use of 2/5-inch ballies as lintels to an elderly villager from Travancore; "he don't seem to grasp one word I say." But the British patiently went on teaching—drawing simple plans, minutely demonstrating, mispronouncing the word or two of Urdu or Hindustani they had acquired; and with no smaller patience the Indians continued to learn. They learnt not only the trades of the carpenter, the bricklayer, the plumber; they were trained in the use of those weapons which, like the temple builders under Nehemiah, they had to carry with them as they worked. Sapper N.C.O.s who had lately been jobbing gardeners gave lessons in infantry tactics. The Sweepers, whose simplicity excited a special affection in British soldiers, learnt with ecstasy how to drill. All this multitude of labourers had to be paid; once a month a subaltern set off across the desert in a Utility with one man as escort and returned with £6,000.

For many miles around everyone must have known all the circumstances of this regular journey. And yet the car was never attacked. "The Arab farmer", said a British soldier with great sincerity, "is a perfect gentleman."

There were dust storms on five days out of seventeen. Work was impossible then; Indians and Arabs alike wrapped themselves in blankets and waited through the hours for the storm to subside while an almost solid rain of dirt swept over and piled up on them. Tents were sent scurrying across the desert, iron roofs were torn from walls and pitched a hundred yards away. As long as the office-tent remained in its place the commander and his adjutant sat in pools of sweat at either side of the folding table, took papers one by one from the heaped 'Action' tray and tried to think of the answer before the paper was blown away or covered with liquefying sand. The sweat ran in rivers down their faces, down chest and back and legs; the sand, driven hard against these dripping surfaces, turned instantly into mud, and soon the two figures, with just their eyes showing, appeared to have been playing Rugby football on an exceptionally dirty day. When the tent was so full of wind and mud that they could no longer read, write or think, they wrapped themselves like their Indian friends and waited for night. Nights were free from storm: calm, clear, and splendid with stars. At dawn the flail of sand began again.

When a storm was finally over there were only the heat and the sandflies to contend with—heat, sandflies, and the arrears in the programme. They worked like madmen to catch up. There are rules which every doctor gives for keeping well in extreme high temperatures: you should move slowly, avoid any great exertion, keep out of the sun; under the overriding law of necessity they broke nearly all these rules, as they had already broken with impunity some of the rules of religious segregation. There were no palliatives to offset any results of this audacity: no heat-stroke centre, no fans, no camel-thorn screens with trickling water. They did their own doctoring, and if a man got really ill he had to be bumped across the desert to Baghdad. They made their own arrangements for hygiene, such as the chlorination of water. ("Is it true", a lance-naik anxiously inquired, "that if I drink chlorinated water I shall become omnipotent?") They issued special rations of salt, and were firm about the covering of heads. Amazingly, the general health stayed good.

The discipline was good as well. In four months only one man was put on a charge, and he for having a rifle stolen—a serious offence which may have been no fault of his own. There was every excuse for discontent, since the men had nothing to reward them for their hardships: no spell of rest, no fun, none of the excitement or glory of actual war. When a few were promised a trip to Baghdad the rain fell so heavily that everyone was kept prisoner in the camp, while a party excavating

on a mound some distance off were isolated for five days and had to be fed from the air. Tired as they were, the heat prevented them from falling asleep; and when they did doze off, the savage flies awoke them. Yet no one grumbled. They worked, at desperate speed, as long as work was possible; had a little food, lay down and shut their eyes; and presently it was time to work again. The one break in the long monotony was when a pillar of cloud came slowly towards them from the south, thrusting at its feet a convoy of lorries. In these were the advance party from the ordnance depot at Shu'aiba. They were cheered and cheered again, like a conquering army.

The secret of such soundness in health and temper lay partly, perhaps, in the dogged cheerfulness of the men who led them, partly in the work itself, which formed its own antidote. The majority can have had no clear understanding of the part they played in the war's complex strategy, but they knew they were there for a purpose, they were creating something they could see for themselves whenever the dust cleared: they were helping to beat the Germans, and for the rest they had no time to worry. They were not particularly strong men, for many had been undernourished from their babyhood. But hardship had quickly created hardness, and a resolution of the spirit. From Basra to the Syrian fortresses there were clumps of men, Indian and British, who suffered the loneliest and most painful period of their existence. Yet few were altogether unhappy. All in the same boat, they found their fellow-voyagers friendly. They were fighting: against time and weather, against their own sickness and the miseries of exile. Corporately, in secret, they were feeling something like the mysterious exhilaration of battle.

CHAPTER XIII

ARMED INTERLUDE IN PERSIA

BUT Paiforce (Persia and Iraq Force), as it will be called now—though it did not receive the name until September 1942—was not allowed to settle to the single task of defending Iraq. It was the fate of this army constantly to have its objects changed, not by the capriciousness of authority, but by the fluctuations of the war. It was the Germans who had written the script for the war, and in 1941 they were still producing it very much on their own lines.

Long before they were thwarted in Iraq, the Germans had turned their eyes to Persia as an alternative region where the British Commonwealth could be effectively sundered, and when the U.S.S.R. and the British Commonwealth became allies Persia was obviously a geographical link which had to be broken at any cost. But Persia offered yet another prize. The oilfields at Naft-i-Shah and Masjid-i-Sulaiman are, outside America, the largest source of petrol supply in the world. Throughout the Middle East, and to a great extent in other theatres as well, the motive power for allied arms at sea, on land and in the air came from that source. Persia, in short, was a country where the Germans could win the war outright; and this was not a fact that their strategists were likely to overlook.

The technique used was similar to that which was applied to Iraq, with the emphasis on commercial penetration. Persia was trying at feverish speed to bring herself up to the economic level of Western nations; in technology and in finance she needed expert assistance: the Germans were ready, apparently with no other object than commercial advantage, to supply it, and in Tehran, the capital, there grew a large colony of German business men secretly subject to the Nazi discipline. Trade is followed by the flag. Inspiring pictures of the Hitler Youth began to appear mysteriously in the little shops of Tabriz and Hamadan. Persians were insidiously taught to regard German goods and German methods as unquestionably superior to those of any other country; from there they were led towards thinking that German views were the only ones that counted. When it became reasonably certain that the Germans were winning the war this opinion seemed to be confirmed.

Commercial influence and all it implied was not, however, enough to meet the Germans' needs. When their armies came into Persia, far from their home base, they would only be able to move at the essential speed if the ground was fully prepared. This meant that a workmanlike Fifth Column was required, and in 1940 secret agents, of whom the

most notable were Franz Mayer and Berthold Schultze, were appointed to organize it. Schultze's special function at a later stage was to aggravate the insubordination of tribesmen in South-West Persia who had been hostile to the Shah's draconic reforms. Mayer was to work nearer the centre, playing upon private political ambitions in the accepted Nazi fashion. Neither of these men was in the first class of German spies. Mayer, though a hard and bold worker, had too much of the romantic and emotional side of the German mentality, and was conspicuously vain. But among the go-getting classes he had remarkable success, and the presence of such agents in an unsettled neutral country which was high on the list of German targets was sufficiently dangerous to be intolerable to the Allies. The Shah was requested by Russia and Great Britain to give practical evidence of his neutrality by removing from Persia those Germans who were engaged in political activity hostile to the Allies. He failed to do so, and the Allies were obliged to safeguard their interests by sending troops into the country. For a few unhappy hours the entrance was resisted.

The races of Persia are brave and hardy; they can make fine soldiers, as they showed when they served under British officers in the South Persia Rifles at the end of the first World War. In 1941 the Persian Army had been well supplied by the Germans with good weapons, mostly got from Czechoslovakia (some of them were found after the operation still in the original packing), and their senior commanders included officers of high ability who had received their training at great European academies such as St. Cyr. In a worthy cause such an army might, with good junior officers, have shown a battle-power worthy of Persia's tremendous history. As it was, the fighting was no Bank Holiday for the Indians and British who took part in it. The wide-spaced and complex operations, so tragic in their necessity, so large in their ultimate effect on the world's history, so small in time that the large-scale history books will perhaps barely mention them, demanded elaborate and skilful planning and great boldness in the execution.

For, to begin with, the very areas where the fighting must necessarily take place held a considerable population of British subjects. And whereas all the brains and sweat of Paiforce had been concentrated on driving northwards they had now to deliver a punch to the east. All the operational plans, all the administrative layout, had to be modified again.

So in the late summer of 1941 the 13th Lancers were brought all the way back from Syria to join the 8th Indian Division at Shu'aiba, and thither went the 24th Indian Infantry Brigade from Tel Ziouane, and No. 1 Squadron of the Guides Cavalry from Khanaqin. Almost in the way of routine the 9th Armoured Brigade, of which the components had been with Kingstone's Column, made the wearisome journey from

Palestine all over again, and (to provide some interest for German Intelligence) sent half their armoured cars, which were all the armour they had, on an outing to Kirkuk. From the Middle East came also the famous 5th Indian Division. With all these sudden movements the administrative organization had to keep level. The hard-pressed motor transport had to be reorganized, vehicles long overdue for complete overhaul were tinkered into some shape for another few hundred miles, drivers had to work still a few hours longer. British-type rations had to be rushed overnight to Kirkuk. Tons of ammunition destined for Mosul were diverted to Khanaqin, which lay over towards the Persian foothills, and there also supplies of meat, vegetables, eggs and ice had to be hurried across from Baghdad, while herds of sheep and goats were driven down from North Iraq. The Sappers, at top speed, started building a bridge of boats across the Shatt al Arab. In the Salachiya workshops of the State Railway Iraqi smiths were forging spare parts for the 25-pounders, while spare recuperator rings, stripped from old equipment in India, were flown out at the eleventh hour, pitched into a Baghdad taxi with an Armament Sergeant-Major and driven across the desert to the fighting guns.

In the event, the units were in their concentration areas some days before the operations were ordered to begin, and while anxious diplomatic negotiations were in progress the commanders revised their plans for using with the utmost effect the slender forces at their disposal.

The southern group was concentrated at Basra under Major-General C. O. Harvey, a gaunt, grey-haired soldier who had faced so many unanswerable problems that he now produced the right answers to them with the lightning certainty of an arithmometer. The crux of his present task was to secure the oil refinery at Abadan, and to secure it intact. This gigantic installation, so vital to the Empire's oil supply, was some fifty miles down-river from Maqil, on a piece of land separated from the mainland of Persia by the River Karun. The island was not a political 'concession' in the sense familiar in China, but the Persian Government in return for royalties and other benefits had given the A.I.O.C. (the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company) large rights upon it. Around the refinery had grown what looked like an English garden suburb, where the Company's officials, including doctors and chaplains, lived with their families; they employed nearly the whole of the local population, with whom they were on the best of terms. This small city General Harvey was required to take into his keeping. His Indian infantry were to deal with any soldiers who obstructed them, but were not to damage the refinery itself or the people who looked after it. The task was as simple as organizing a harmless revolver competition for boys in the china and glassware department of Selfridge's Store.

The men of the 2/6 Rajputana Rifles and the 1st Kumaon Rifles, to whom the main part of the job fell, and the majority of whom had not

seen action before, were in no way disturbed by it. At 7 p.m. on the 24th August they had their evening meal, and at 9 o'clock, wearing gym shoes, with boots on their backs and with haversack rations, the Rajputanas embarked in the little American motor-boats called Eureka which had to serve as landing-craft, the Kumaonis in paddle-boats. With the perversity of the Iraq climate it was very cold. The boats moved down the dark river, stopped for what seemed to be hours, moved on at quarter-throttle. The men crouched in utter silence, seeing nothing but the dark wall of palms. They were not excited. They had been told what they had to do and they knew very well the officers who would be immediately in front of them. Their only positive emotion was one of pleasant expectancy: for in this affair they were to use live rounds.

Like all the battles of history this one failed, in detail, to go according to plan. A field regiment which was to support the infantry arrived when the list of entries had closed, and was just disembarking as the flotilla was moving off. The loading of the heavy equipment which was to follow the infantry proved even more awkward than had been expected, and while this was in progress the tugs assisting the affair were suddenly called away: the Shatt al Arab, with its tedious treachery, had produced a sandbank where none had been before and the *Falmouth*, which was to give covering fire to the landing parties, was now fast aground. For a further complication, two merchant vessels upon their lawful occasions had tied up, the day before, at that particular section of the quay at Abadan where one party had been detailed to land. The consequence of these mischances was that the party detailed as second landing wave was actually ashore before the first, and every commander concerned had to rearrange the terms of his orders at the very brink of action. Fortunately the main body of the defenders, quartered in their barracks, had not been warned of the impending landing until it was too late for them to join the fighting; they moved northward in some disorder and crossed the Karun; but the defence posts along the quay had been well sited and were courageously manned. The frail Eureka did the last few yards of their long journey through a tightening web of fire from the machine-guns, in which the Battalion Commander, Lt.-Col. Ridley, was struck, and his men, seeing him fall, hurled themselves ashore in a sudden madness for revenge.

And now the ugliness of the problem showed. The main administrative building stood outside the refinery fence: it should, at that hour, have been empty. But the signal for the landing had been the firing of a Persian gunboat by the guns of the *Yarra*; a watchman in the refinery, carrying out his routine orders, had sounded the fire alarm, and the Company's staff, also carrying out routine orders with admirable discipline, had gone instantly to their fire-alarm posts, which were the

offices in which they worked. At the same time, one of the Company's ambulances drove up to the office building; it bore no red cross, for the Persian Government did not allow such a display of a Christian symbol, and out of it stepped three men in the blue uniform worn by the Company's janitors. Inevitably, the Rajputs took these to be enemy soldiers, and from that conclusion it was the shortest step to supposing that the big building in front, clearly outside the fence, was an enemy stronghold. Bred and trained as fighting men, they did not hesitate; they charged across the intervening lawn and car park, crashed inside, and before the mistake could be overtaken in the smoke of action they had killed two of the British officials and wounded others. Farther along the river front, where the Kumaonis were advancing through the palm groves, a number of employees inevitably fell victim to this battle which they hardly realized had grown up about them.

These tragic episodes stand out in memory. But when the whole exploit is studied in perspective it emerges as a success for which the word 'brilliant' is hardly excessive: within a few hours the whole of the refinery and cantonment were clear and under British-Indian safeguard; the damage done was insignificant; the casualties in the landing parties and among civilians were numerically small. The Works Manager of the A.I.O.C., who went through a nightmare of dual responsibility and who was gravely wounded, was among the first to say that the securing of the refinery could not have been achieved by other means or with greater skill; not one of the employees, whatever his nationality, forsook his loyalty to the Company. That loyalty was strikingly demonstrated at the pumping installation, where Persian soldiers who had a post on the roof resisted with the highest bravery and a duel of fire went on for hours before they were dislodged: while machine-gun bullets cracked over and around the station, the men inside, British and Persian, worked on as steadily as if they were a trained tank crew. It was well that they did so, for this plant pumps more water than the whole supply of the London Metropolitan Water Board, and had it ceased to function the refinery would have gone sky-high. In one of the residential flats the Persian soldiers again fought with very tenacious gallantry, but by five o'clock in the afternoon all resistance was over.

While the landing parties were moving down the river, two battalions of the 18th and one of the 24th Indian Infantry Brigades, with a squadron of the Guides and a battery of field artillery, were also on the move. With infinite patience and skill they, with their vehicles and equipment, had been gradually ferried over from Maqil to Tanuma, on the north bank of the river, and now they were travelling fast across the desert on a big loop which was to bring them into Khorramshahr from the north. Khorramshahr, which is close to the junction of the Karun and the Shatt al Arab, lies on the Persian mainland just

opposite Abadan Island. The 25th Indian Infantry Brigade, which included the 1/5 Mahratta Light Infantry and the 2 Royal/11 Sikh Regiment, with the 13th Lancers under command, were moving still further to the north with a village called Qasr Shaikh as their objective. The purpose of these movements, which had some resemblance to the tactics used at Benghazi, was to pinch off a bridgehead from which to make a further advance into the country. Here the timing worked perfectly. Although the 13th Brigade were used as a target by tribesmen, who are always glad of a little shooting before breakfast, they reached Khorramshahr at four in the morning, the time ordered, and very shortly the town and its wireless station, with a quantity of military equipment, were in their possession, while a company of Baluchi had also captured the naval barracks. By midday the 25th Brigade had taken Qasr Shaikh, where the Persians fought stoutly and the Sikhs proved once again their superb quality as fighters. On the following day a ferry was improvised across the Karun, and the 13th Brigade immediately pushed on some way towards Ahwaz.

These operations with Khorramshahr as the focal point, complex as they were in routeing and timing, formed only a part—geographically the centre part—of a larger and minutely ordered design. Its essence was to put troops in the country at several strategic points simultaneously, and with such speed that any opposition would be stunned. As the Persian people were told by thousands of leaflets, it was no part of the allied purpose to take Persian lives, to interfere with Persian property or liberties; neither were there Indian or British lives to spare for such an adventure. Diplomatic relations with Persia were, in fact, never broken. The sole object of the Allies was to defeat the German intention; their weapons were not vast armies but resolution and speed.

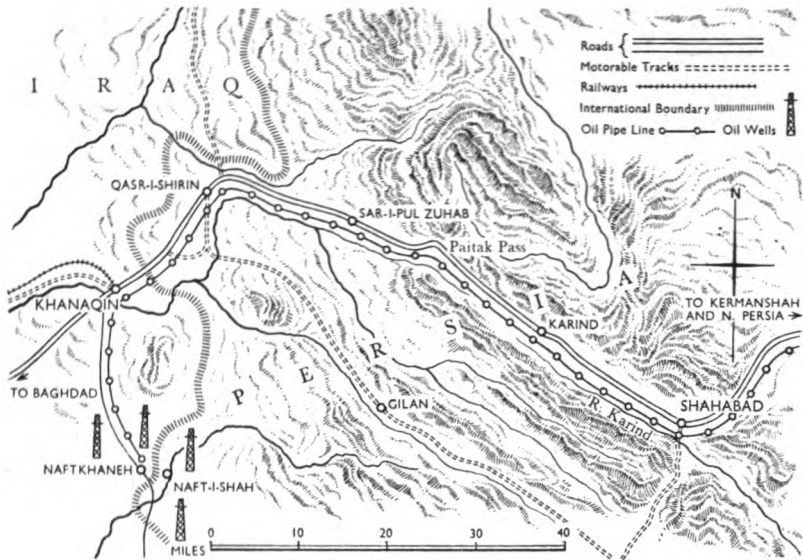
In those chilly hours when the Eureka moved eerily down the Shatt al Arab, when the Khorramshahr and Qasr Shaikh columns were rumbling northward across the desert, the Australian armed merchant cruiser *Kanimbla*, from some way out in the Gulf, was steering under darkness towards Bandar Shahpur, the little harbour at which the Trans-Iranian railway reached the sea. Aboard the *Kanimbla* were two companies of the 3/10 Baluch Regiment under Major W. E. Maxwell. At 7.15 the first wave of the Baluchis landed on the jetty, using local dhows in addition to such boats as their transport could muster, and by the time the second wave followed at 8.30 they had the harbour in their own control: to the distress of more than three hundred German gentlemen, all identically clad in sports-coats and flannel trousers, all with identical suitcases, who had been attracted to this place from various parts of Persia by the excellent bathing and the purity of the air. While the landing operations were in progress, ships' crews of the Royal Navy and the Royal Indian Navy were boarding the five German and three Italian ships in the harbour: they were quick enough to save

all but one of these ships, which had been prepared for scuttling, and a plan of the harbour with Italian annotations, which the harbour-master had curiously overlooked, was also saved. That night the Persian commander of two gunboats was the guest of honour at a dinner aboard one of His Britannic Majesty's ships: the Germans were omitted from the invitation. At precisely the hour when the first wave leapt ashore at Bandar Shahpur another company of the Baluchi were reaching terra firma dryshod some eighty miles to the north-east at a place called Haft Kel. Their task was to protect a convoy of British families in the mountain oilfields who, in fact, were now collected rather anxiously in the manager's bungalow at Masjid-i-Sulaiman, surrounded by a bored and apologetic prison-guard of Persian soldiers whom they had formerly employed as laundrymen or butlers. The relieving column arrived, though high in spirit, a little shaken, for conditions had made landing barely possible and two of the Vickers-Victorias which had brought them were now a crumpled mess. With none of these movements did hostile aircraft interfere. The R.A.F. had paid precautionary attention to Ahwaz aerodrome. There were 200 Cobras which might have been used against them, but 199 were still in cases, and having assembled the other one, an American mechanic, who knew on whose side he personally was neutral, jumped in and flew her to Baghdad.

On the same historic night, 24th - 25th August, a much larger operation was opening more than 300 miles to the north-west. Its base was Khanaqin, which is a little over 100 miles to the north-east of Baghdad and might be called the main west gateway of Persia. This last village of the Iraq plain looks closely upon the rampart mountains of Luristan; from it starts the ancient route that wriggles through the Paitak Pass towards Tehran, 600 miles away, and on to the Russian steppes. Southward, some thirty miles across the foothills, is the oilfield of Naft-i-Shah. The primary task given to General Slim, who came back from Syria to take command on the very eve of the operation, was to secure both the oilfield and the pass, exploiting as far as Kermanshah. When this was accomplished the whole column would thrust on north-eastward towards central Persia, while Harvey's force came up from the south and the Russians simultaneously penetrated from the north. That was the grand design. It might well have looked too grand to a commander who, with hardly more than a skeleton division at his disposal, gazed forward to one of the largest and wildest mountain regions in the world. But to General Slim a little problem of this kind was like the whiff of rabbit to a fox-terrier. The experienced Brigadier Aizlewood had already planned a pincer movement in the meticulous detail needed for country which gives none of the ordinary scope for manoeuvre. Slim took over the plan as it stood.

Events proved the skill of Aizlewood's timings. The 14/20 Hussars

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PERSIAN CAMPAIGN: NORTHERN AREA

had to make a circuitous night march of extraordinary difficulty in order to surround Qasr-i-Shirin, their objective on the road to the Paitak Pass, but by a quarter to five on the morning of the 25th, when there was just light enough for a set-piece battle, they were in position north-west, north and east of the village. A column from the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade (which consisted of the 4/13 Frontier Force Rifles and the 2/4 Gurkha Rifles) then came upon it from the south and took it. At the same hour a lightning thrust from Naftkhaneh, at the mountains' edge, had secured the Naft-i-Shah oilfield before any opposition could be properly organized. A third column which included light tanks penetrated to Gilan, where it was held up by rifle, machine-gun and anti-tank fire; Gilan is about 25 miles due south of Sar-i-Pul Zuhab, which the northern column reached at half-past three on the same day. By midday on the 26th the anti-tank obstacle at Gilan was cleared, and the southern column pushed on, with only deserted road-blocks to be elbowed aside, to reach the Kermanshah road at Shahabad. This village was occupied early in the morning of the 27th. They were now a long way ahead of the northern column, which had found the Paitak Pass to be strongly defended. The Pass is steep, narrow and hazardous; there could hardly be a better place for resolute defenders to hold up an advancing column, and although the Frontier troops were experienced in the technique of mountain warfare the task of outflanking the defences might have occupied several days; but here the scheme for air co-operation which had been worked out

beforehand came into play. R.A.F. Blenheims appearing in flights of thirty peeled off and screamed across the teeth of rock; when light came on the 27th the defenders had gone.

From Shahabad the columns, now united, moved forward. At Zabiri they were checked again: by this high village the Persians had disposed their artillery with skill, and they had registered accurately on the road. An attack on the position was mounted and was to be launched at 10 o'clock.

The attack never took place. In Tehran the diplomats had been busy, and when certain Persian politicians had resigned from office the way was clear for men of good will and understanding to agree upon the folly of further bloodshed. Their task was the easier because there was, between the Persian people and the Allies, no quarrel at all. On the morning of the 28th General Moggadam, the able and much-liked commander of the Persian forces operating from Kermanshah, received a message from the capital. A little before 10 o'clock a Persian officer with a white flag was hurrying to meet the British commander along the road.

There was much to be settled immediately when a truce had been agreed. In the afternoon General Moggadam called upon his friend Mr. Robertson, the manager of the Kermanshah refinery. They had been fellow guests at a wedding-party a few nights before, and since the opening of hostilities had been in constant communication about the protection of the refinery against local banditry; both had been extremely anxious that the oil should be preserved, though they may have differed in their private reasons for wanting to preserve it. The General now asked if Mr. Robertson, with the senior members of his staff, would go with him to meet General Slim. "I want to convince the British General that none of you has been ill-treated." To this Robertson replied that he would gladly go himself, but that it was impossible to take the members of his staff. Why not? Because they were at this moment on the golf-course playing a foursome which they had fixed up at lunch. The General sighed. The British! With the courtesy of all Persians he bowed the manager into his car.

The forces in South-West Persia had, in the meantime, been continuing their advance towards Ahwaz, which may be loosely described as the southern capital; the 18th Brigade moved along the east bank, the 25th Brigade along the west, while the 24th Brigade remained to organize fully the protection of Abadan. As the columns came near Ahwaz they increased their speed until, in the words of a company commander, "We were driving flat-out into the battle". And upon this gallant unorthodoxy the curtain fell, with the signal to Cease Fire. It was like the end of an exercise. The men were being gathered for the inspection of arms and equipment, officers were climbing into their cars to report to their C.O.s, exhausted signallers were wearily reeling-in their telephone cable. Instinctively some officers looked about to see

what had happened to the umpires. An elderly Englishwoman appeared from somewhere and embraced a Brigade Major. "I said I'd do it," she obscurely remarked, "and now I *have* done it." The Persian troops returned to barracks, the Indians plunged into the cooling waters of the Karun (not knowing then that it was infested by sharks), the British went hungrily off for tea. Civilians round about appeared to have taken not the smallest interest in the affair.

The terms of armistice, comprising twenty words, were pencilled on the back of a message form.

All the operations in Persia had cost the Imperial forces seventeen lives, including those of five British officers, and forty-two were wounded. There were other evil consequences. The suddenness of the entry caused such confusion among some of the opposing forces that many of their weapons were lost; a number was collected by the British and Indians (one British officer in a short motor drive picked up three hundred rifles), but the great majority fell into the eager hands of tribesmen whom the Government had been energetically disarming; these had now the finest tools that Germany could supply for their traditional recreations of feud and highway robbery. That was one aftermath of the melancholy situation in which British and Indians had, for a few days, been at blows with a good and variously talented people to whom they had long been bound by many ties.

But the swiftness of the action, based upon brilliant improvisation, had reduced to the minimum its hurtfulness. In just four days the job was finished. The vast majority of Persian lives had been wholly untouched by it; even while their British employers had been held in confinement, Persians in the oilfields had quietly continued their work, while no single article was stolen from the British bungalows. As the British had promised, not one of the Persians had lost his liberty, and those among them who studied the world's news discerningly could see that they had been saved from visitors of a very different kind.

There was much to be done now that the shooting had finished. In Tehran the diplomatists were still busy: they were to produce eventually, as the fruit of their work, a treaty by which Persia came into full and free partnership with the Allies (a union which she later made practical by a gigantic contribution of labour). The feeding and clothing of the Persian people, a great part of whose crops had been sent to Germany, was a problem with which the Allies would be deeply concerned. For the moment, however, the task was to make the country secure against lawless elements who would try to draw their own dividend from the interregnum in armed authority. Paiforce had added to its burden of responsibility the security of a country larger than the Union of South Africa. The tiny, sweating army at Kerman-shah began to march sturdily northward through the mountains to meet the Russians at Kazvin.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEFENCE OF THE AREA

THAT summer, the signal routes from London to New Delhi, New Delhi to Cairo, Cairo to Baghdad, were heavily loaded with messages in cipher. And in September the great architects of Middle East strategy were round a table in Baghdad to thrash out the defence of Syria, Iraq and Persia. General Wavell, Commander-in-Chief India, presided, and General Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief Middle East, was at his side. With them were General Quinan and the General Officer Commanding Palestine and Transjordan, the Air Officers Commanding Iraq and Levant, and Sir Kinahan Cornwallis. These seven men could see the picture in its full proportions, and the picture was a large one, for as they thought of men and the fuel of war they had to look westward all along the African coast and eastward towards the Bay of Bengal. Wavell and Quinan flew on to Tehran (in those days Wavell came nearer than any man has done to being in three or four places at the same time) to confer with the General Officer Commanding the Russian forces in Persia, and with the British Ambassador, Sir Reader Bullard, whose wisdom was proverbial in Asia. In October, on his way to Russia, Wavell was in Baghdad again.

It was the habit of General Wavell, in the words of one who knew his methods, "to get hold of a problem and give it a brisk shaking, so that all the irrelevancies fell away and he was left with the essentials". His appreciation of the state of affairs in Iraq and Persia was contained in a note of 637 words. The kernel of it was this:

"For a force inferior in numbers and armoured forces there is no suitable position for static defence that cannot easily be turned. Defence must be by manœuvre within an *area* that cannot easily be attacked or turned by the enemy without his exposing himself to counterstroke at a disadvantage if our troops are mobile and skilfully handled."

The area he chose was a triangle standing upside down with its apex on Baghdad, with the Tigris and Diyala rivers as its two sides, and its base on the Turkish border. Mosul and Kirkuk were included in this triangle. For the protection of Baghdad against any threat from the west he made supplementary plans.

At this time the total field forces available were the 6th and 8th Indian Divisions, each with only two brigades, the 10th Indian Division and the 2nd Armoured Brigade. The 5th Indian Division was also in the area, but without any maintenance transport (which, as General Quinan patiently observed, "further complicated the supply problem"),

and was destined very soon to move back to the Middle East. The 6th Division had taken over in Persia, where, in addition to the normal duties of protecting a vast extent of country and the highly vulnerable oil installations, it had to support the Persian Army in their efforts to stamp out tribal risings in Persian Kurdistan. In effect, there were one division and one short division (out of the ten divisions for which the administrative services were preparing) to defend Iraq; and the Germans were driving hard towards Kharkov and into the Crimea. Wavell might well refer, in his appreciation, to "the paucity of our forces".

One brigade of the 6th and one of the 10th Division were detailed for protective duties in Iraq. These had to guard the Basra-Shu'aiba base area, where the dumps were spreading to cover more and more acres of desert every day; the several routes and increasing number of installations in the 300 miles between Basra and Baghdad; the 300-mile line of communications from Baghdad westward to Habbaniya and Rutba; the oilfields of Kirkuk and the pipelines. It was rather as if two brigades had to protect the English coast-line from Ramsgate to Penzance, with Donnington and Chilwell added; except that every point on the English coast is reached by metalled road, and the tribesmen of Sussex and Cornwall have long been quiescent. The remainder of the 10th Division got down to the siting and construction of defence works in the Baghdad area, while the 8th Division did the same work in the area of Mosul.

Mosul, to the casual eye a set of stage flats for an Ali Baba pantomime, lies only a few miles from the enchanting hills of Kurdistan; on its outskirts, near the R.A.F. Station, are fields and mulberry trees against the Tigris where for an instant the exile can imagine he is in Suffolk or Cambridge. But the Mosul district presents to the foreign soldier the worst of nearly all the worlds. The countryside is very little altered from the southern desert; the rectangle of shallow hills lying hard against the north-east of the city are no real hills at all, but only the weather-blotted walls and palaces of Nineveh. The important difference is that here there is rock. It was the task of the 8th Division to construct a perimeter which would contain one division while an armoured division operated from it. General Harvey's plan was to make ready positions for two brigade groups on the west side of the city and for one on the east side, while a further brigade group was to operate at a forward position near Zakho, eighty miles to the north; at each of these sectors there were to be obstacles, sited in depth, at which the enemy would be checked while the British forces, operating on prepared lines, could attack him with mortal effect. This plan, which was modified by degrees as it became known what force was likely to be available, involved a huge programme of digging: in one sector alone twenty-four miles of anti-tank ditch had to be cut through solid rock. Engineer and Pioneer companies were both in short supply, so that

infantrymen—jacks of every trade and masters of many—found themselves operating compressors. No bulldozers were available. The thousands of coolies who were hired for the work had to be housed and administered in camps, and—at a time when the supply of foodstuffs was in a dangerous position throughout Iraq—the feeding alone of these men set up new stresses right back to the Base. Once more the soldiers of whom no one ever heard were suffering nearly all the hardships of battle: living in tents where it is ordeal enough to live in thick-walled houses, always working against time, eternally trying to make themselves understood by men of another language who, untrained in discipline or method, had not the smallest notion how or why the job was being done. In the autumn rain fell, converting the area into bog; men who had learnt to live through sandstorms had now to work floundering in slime, and the lorries, each one trying to do the work of four, had constantly to be hauled by tractors out of the imprisoning mud.

This titanic labour, designed to form the framework for a battle of manoeuvre over a huge area, would have been almost useless if that battle could not be controlled. In such a theatre, the army commander might be more than two hundred miles from some of his formations and he might have to move them according to intelligence relayed to him through thousands of miles. It was now the business of Signals to see that the focal points of the framework were connected, so that orders and messages could go between them without being intercepted. Since the civil trunk lines which existed were hardly more than an experimental frolic, the Signalmen started from scratch.

But this was not their only task. As soon as Persia came within the Paiforce orbit a Lines of Communication network was wanted there. The R.A.F. needed local lines to section operation rooms in Maqil, Kirkuk, Mosul, Abadan and Tehran, junction lines to landing grounds, maintenance units and high-frequency direction-finding stations, special trunk lines to Habbaniya. The Royal Navy required telephone and teleprinter services to their various stations in the Gulf. And again, the Army Base Area, as it swelled and became more complex, required a continually expanding telephone service. To begin with there was only a single Indian L. of C. Signals unit to cope with the work. This unit, of which the main part arrived in June 1941, was composed largely of technicians from the Indian Posts and Telegraph Department. It was joined by a second unit, similarly composed, in July. And in September-October, when it was still too hot for the men to climb telegraph posts after 11 in the morning, these units took just six weeks to build a reliable line for speech and telegraph the whole way (following the Euphrates) from Basra to Baghdad. Units and sub-units, including a number of construction sections, continued to filter through from India. The A.I.O.C., who always acted as the Army's private Whiteley's, lent two of their civilian construction sections. And

in October the first L. of C. Signals company to come from the United Kingdom arrived at Basra (where they were welcomed by one of Basra's choicest sandstorms). Yet the list of urgent tasks grew much faster than the number of signalmen at hand to cope with them.

The lines lengthened and shot forth tentacles, as in the animated diagrams of instructional films. But that was not the picture which the linemen saw. They saw only the procession of posts stretching behind them into the watery distance, each one the product of gruelling hours; the grubby yellow-brown of the simmering desert going on for ever and ever ahead; a dancing spot which might be a speck of sand in the eye or with luck the unit lorry bucketing its way towards them. On any morning a mile or two of the wiring might have to be done all over again: copper wire was wonderfully useful, it fetched a good price in the bazaars; manna had once fallen every morning in the desert of Sinai, not so far off; and there were tribesmen who supposed that telegraph wire was provided for their welfare in just the same way.

The tempo could not slacken, for away in the north the Germans were not slackening. In every department a leaven of British troops was arriving in teaspoonfuls, from the ships which had made a three months journey round Africa, from the convoys grinding over the desert from Palestine: men from Dorset and Renfrewshire, from Grantham and Glamorgan, who parenthetically cursed the heat and the famine of beer and nailed the photos of their girls on tent-poles and set about their jobs with a kind of insolent contempt for the hardship and unfamiliarity: it seemed a rum sort of hell they had got to, but they supposed there was a cock-eyed war on. The pace of accomplishment increased. From the desperate shifts of early days, and despite the new strain thrust upon supplies and transport by the columns moving fast and far through Persia, there was emerging painfully the workmanlike pattern which the Army imposes on its jobs: when the Germans came there would be lives to pay for any untidiness in organization. And still the worst shortage was the shortage of men, men to fight, men to dig, men who could drive and repair machines, who could sort and organize and build. In May, the experts said, if not before, the Germans would have not fewer than five divisions on the borders of Iraq. Long before then the stage had got to be properly set.

Once more, the force was not allowed to concentrate on the single task of mounting a gigantic battle in North Iraq. Britain had given her pledge of unlimited material aid to her new Ally, and on the southern side it was the Army's business to see the pledge fulfilled. The country was passing into winter, the bitterest winter in living memory. And in October General Quinan was given one more new directive:

" . . . You will also take steps to develop such road, rail and river communications as are necessary to ensure . . . the maximum possible delivery of supplies to Russia . . ."

CHAPTER XV

THE CALL FROM THE NORTH

THE Persian Gulf route has often been called The Back Door into Russia. The phrase suggests that there is a handsome front door approached by a carefully weeded path. Men who sailed, and sailed again, on the Arctic route to Murmansk and Archangel never saw it quite like that. A route through the Dardanelles did not exist, for, even had the Mediterranean been open and safe to Allied shipping, Germany controlled the western shore of the Black Sea and presently held the Crimea. The eastern entrance through Vladivostok might have seemed a good one to casual theorists, but Vladivostok was more than four thousand miles overland from the battlefields and it was soon to be closed to all ships except Russia's own. In short, there was no front door. Except for the trickle that came across Siberia, every ton of material that the Allies sent to Russia, every tank, every bandage, every bullet had either to be fought by sailors through the Arctic shambles or to cross the strip of land between the Russian border and the Persian Gulf.

A narrow strip, it generally appears. In school atlases Persia and Iraq are seldom given the dignity of a special page; perhaps because this portion of the earth's surface, coming between Europe and India, is classed as neither the one thing nor the other. The eccentric pupil who wants to look at these countries must turn to 'Asia-Political', and here, probably, his thumb-nail will fit exactly between Basra and the Russian border above Tabriz. The immediate impression is that from Basra one would get to Russia on a modest taxi fare.

Actually, the shortest road distance from the south Russian border to Basra is over a thousand miles, and is about equal to the distance from the west Russian border to Antwerp. Within this sleeve of land are nearly all the obstacles which Nature devises against travel: deserts with no water and no landmarks, deserts with soft and treacherous sands, malarious bogs; not one range but a series of ranges of high, precipitous mountains, often piled with snow or drenched from the snow thawing, the home of bears and eagles; sandstorms, rainstorms, blizzards of snow and hail; the highest and the lowest temperatures that man can survive, sometimes hard against each other in space or in time. To these hazards humanity has added its own: nomadic herds-men whose weapons belong to the twentieth century A.D. and whose politics to the twentieth B.C. In mitigation man had made, by 1938, one suckling railway line; there was still no proper road from north to south at all. To build, across these wastes of steeping rock and

mapless sand, a traffic route which would carry in vast quantities all the implements of war, appeared to need something like a five-year plan. But the Russians were not in a position to wait five years; from the time the Germans crashed across their western border they wanted supplies within five weeks, or a good deal sooner if it could be done.

Mr. Winston Churchill told the Russians that they would get what they wanted, and Lord Beaverbrook, who went to examine their requirements in detail, renewed that promise. Neither was a man who believed in words as a substitute for action.

The pioneers of the trans-Persian supply route, to whom the Army would pay the highest tribute, were British civilians employed by the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation. This Corporation had been launched by the British Government in 1940 primarily as an agency to buy the world's produce for the Allies before the enemy could buy it. In extension of this task, it was given by degrees the responsibility for a great deal of trading which was essential to the prosecution of the war and was beyond the resources of ordinary commercial firms. In late August 1941 the U.K.C.C. were charged with the task of supplying Russia by the southern route, and they immediately set about procuring what was wanted. They ordered wool and lead from Australia, aluminium and cobalt from Canada, jute and shellac from India, tea and rubber from Ceylon, coffee and sisal from East Africa, oilseeds from West Africa, hospital tents from Palestine, industrial diamonds from South Africa, machine tools from the United Kingdom. Within one week supplies were being loaded into ships; a fortnight later the first of those ships was steaming up the Persian Gulf.

And at one of the Gulf ports they might, in all the circumstances, have stayed for weeks. But the small staff belonging to the U.K.C.C. office in Tehran had not been idle. Whatever curious, outmoded, lopsided means there did exist for moving things from place to place in Persia these men knew as season-ticket holders know the Edgware and Morden Underground. While the ships were being loaded in the distant ports they had been busy negotiating with contractors: with Persians and Turcomans, Armenians, Syrians and Jews. At the same time a young clerk whose previous experience had been in the warehouses of Mark Lane was told to find his way from Tehran to the Gulf port of Bushire and open a workshop for assembling lorries. With two other Englishmen he did so; one was a representative of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (for the tremendous contribution of the oil companies to the Allied victory was never limited to the production of oil). These three men scoured the countryside for everyone who could use his hands or be taught to—barbers, undertakers, herdsmen—put these recruits into billets, collected food, water, and even ice for them; showed them how a spanner is held, which way a nut will tighten, how

to know when it has turned far enough. Miraculously, the imported trucks were put together—at first, only one at a time—and were loaded immediately from the waiting ships.

To begin with, the motor transport fleet which the contractors assembled was made up chiefly from the single lorries of owner-drivers who, in the few large centres of population, were accustomed to make their living chiefly by local carrying. These drivers had their own methods, and it was impossible to make them work in convoys or according to a proper time and distance schedule. The Persian motorist likes to go on driving until he gets to a village he knows, be it far or near. There he will go to the dwelling of his choice to find tea, food, and other creature comforts. He will stay, sleeping, smoking or talking so long as it seems good to him, and will then perhaps do another spell of driving which would exhaust the stamina of most Europeans. His machine does its work in defiance of any mere scientific law. He will first load it without any pedantic regard for the manufacturer's views on what it can stand. As he goes along he will stop to pick up a passenger or two, on a simple financial arrangement; if a passenger has a few crates with him, a basket of cabbages, three ewes, a wife and a donkey-foal, these are courteously disposed upon the roof. Presently, on a gradient of one-in-ten, the engine coughs and expires. The driver opens the steaming bonnet and with a rusty branding-iron gives a shrewd cuff to one or two of the cylinders; the engine functions again. A few more miles and a tyre bursts; the driver mends the inner tube and sews a piece of canvas on to the outer cover. When another hundred and fifty miles have passed a curious wavering of the rear wheels suggests that the back-axle is sickening; this, in Army parlance, calls for Second Echelon Repair, and at the next village the blacksmith's nephew is instructed to graft on a portion of the axle from a disused droshky. In time (and often in a surprisingly short time) the driver nonchalantly arrives at his destination. For these men, quite unconsciously, had unlimited endurance. The 'roads' they drove on were not roads at all: they were merely routes which men and donkeys were accustomed to use and on which a spadeful of earth and pebbles was occasionally thrown into the deeper pot-holes. These tracks climbed, in places, as high as 10,000 feet, where the temperature might be 60 degrees below zero, while in the plains the shade temperature often rose above 120 degrees. To set out across a hundred miles of desert with an aged chassis and a spluttering engine needs courage; it needs what some would call heroism to drive steeply downwards over a sheet of ice with a 2,000-foot precipice upon one side. The Persians did these things without any evidence of alarm. Neither did the constant risk of attack by brigands frighten them. In their own rather unmilitary fashion they carried out their orders.

The U.K.C.C. very rapidly took steps to turn this fantasia upon the

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laws of chance into something like organization. They built main and subsidiary workshops, rest-houses for drivers. They started schools to train new drivers and mates. The assembly plant at Bushire was developed until it could turn out 60 to 70 trucks a day. But the whole task of building and maintaining a transport system from the Gulf to Russia was on a scale which no commercial organization, however large in will-power and resources, could manage alone. Paiforce had to take over the main responsibility, because only the Army could supply the force of technicians needed—the engineers, the dock operators, the motor mechanics, the railwaymen; and only the Army had ready-made a detailed system by which so huge a project could be administered. The U.K.C.C. did not disappear from Persia; they remained not only to give invaluable advice but to play a large part in the operation of Aid to Russia throughout its history. The greater burden, however, shifted by degrees on to men in uniform.

CHAPTER XVI

PORTS, RIVERS, RAILWAYS, ROADS

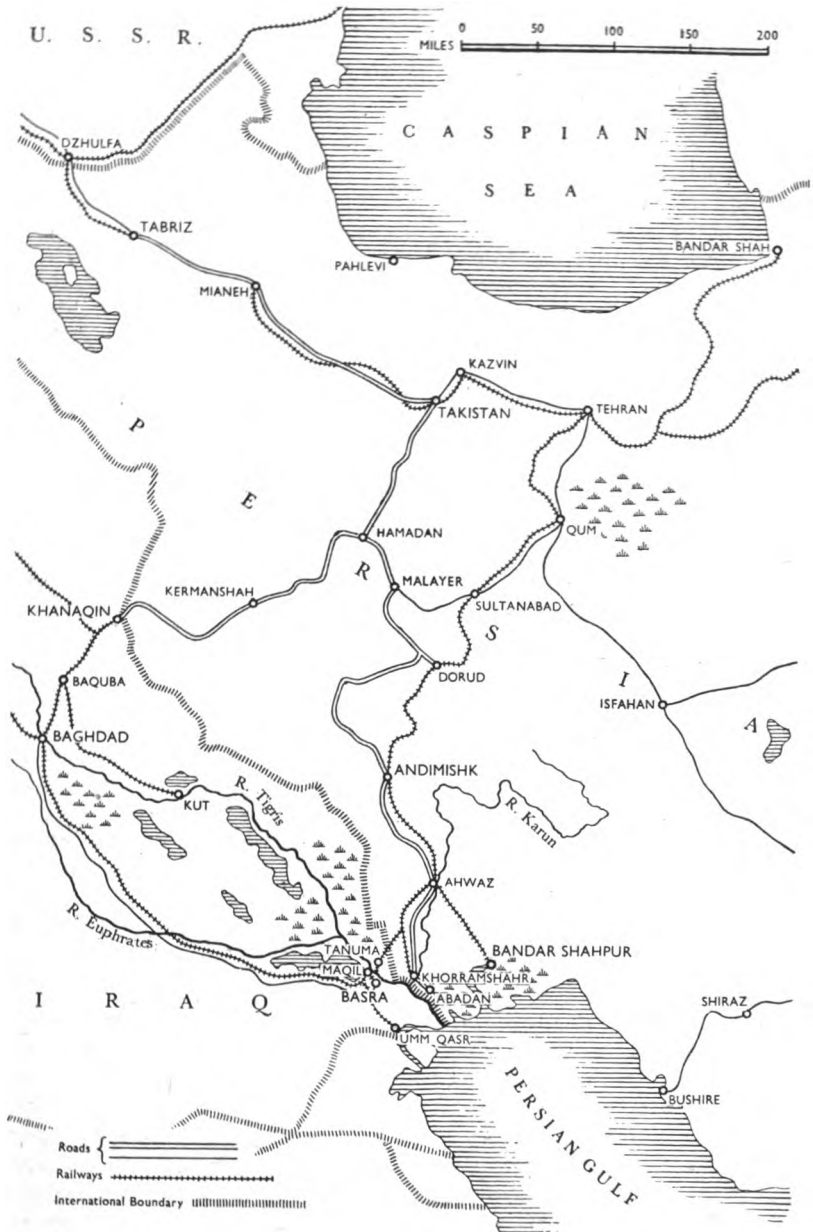
THERE was another and more important reason why the Army had to be responsible for the whole Aid to Russia plan: only the Army had the means to judge what kind of traffic must, at any particular date, be given priority.

There were two main tasks: one was to be ready to fight the Germans on advantageous terms at the moment when they swung south into Persia or Iraq (or even before, if the Russians had so wished); the other, to give Russia the tools she so badly needed. Neither of these tasks could be regarded as secondary, since if Russia were knocked out the enemy would come south in such strength that British resources would be totally unable to check him, while if he first turned and succeeded in cutting the Iraq-Persia corridor the Allies would no longer be able to help Russia at all. So, while all the emphasis in planning was on accelerating deliveries to Russia, the plans had to be so framed that the entire effort could be switched over, at a day's notice, to the maintenance of British forces in actual battle. The problem was complicated by the fact that the Army had other responsibilities as well; in particular, that of seeing that the economic life of the Iraq and Persian nations, Britain's allies, was maintained at the highest level compatible with the circumstance of total war.

The two main tasks always conflicted: for example, the handling of goods such as machine-tools, tractors and basic materials, which the Russians urgently required, demands methods and equipment different from those used to carry the day-to-day requirements of an army in the field; loading is done on entirely different principles. Again, the constructional programme for roads, bridges, etc., was bound to differ according to the destination at which supplies were aiming: in broad terms, the tactical lines required were not the same as the strategic ones. The conflict of objectives showed most vividly in the problem of ports.

The first requirement, in handling all supplies, was to get the goods off the ships. Those ships whose starting-point was in America or the United Kingdom had come all the way round Africa, an addition of 10,000 miles to the peace-time route through the Mediterranean, and when they reached the Gulf coast they could not be kept hanging about. The vast output of the American plants, the million upon million cases of material which tired men and women had laboured to produce in the blacked-out factories of Coventry and Leeds, all these fruits of Allied skill and energy were piling up along the quaysides of Boston and Philadelphia, of the Mersey and the Clyde: every day more ships

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ROUTES TO RUSSIA

were being sunk: to keep one ship idle for a day was a positive contribution towards losing the war. But Persia had no good port at all. The railway line, after its splendid passage through the mountain ranges, came down to the paltry harbour of Bandar Shahpur, where at the single jetty only two large ships could be berthed at one time. What could charitably be called the north-south road ended at Bushire, and there the ships had to stand seven miles off shore while their cargoes were brought in to the primitive quays in native dhows. At Abadan was the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's port, and although it was fully used for the vital task of supplying oil to the three Services the Company gave freely of its facilities, such as transportable cranes, lighterage and expert dock-operators; but as an entrance into Persia it had no immediate use, since it was on the wrong side of the Karun. Further up the Shatt al Arab, where the Karun joined it, was Khorramshahr. There had been plans for developing this port before the war, but money had run out; it had now one small concrete jetty of Belgian construction and two lightly constructed jetties suitable only for discharging barges. There were also wharves at Ahwaz, but these could only be reached by barges, and the barges had to work their way for more than a hundred miles through the serpentine, capricious channels of the Karun, which in the dry season allowed a draught of only 2 feet 6 inches. It was not surprising that the Aid to Russia planners, faced by this desperate shortage of deep-water berths, looked covetously across to Maqil, where the indomitable energy of the Indian stevedores, crane-drivers, winchmen and checkers was vastly accelerating the discharge of ships, and where to the six deep-water berths of the workmanlike pre-war port another six were being added.

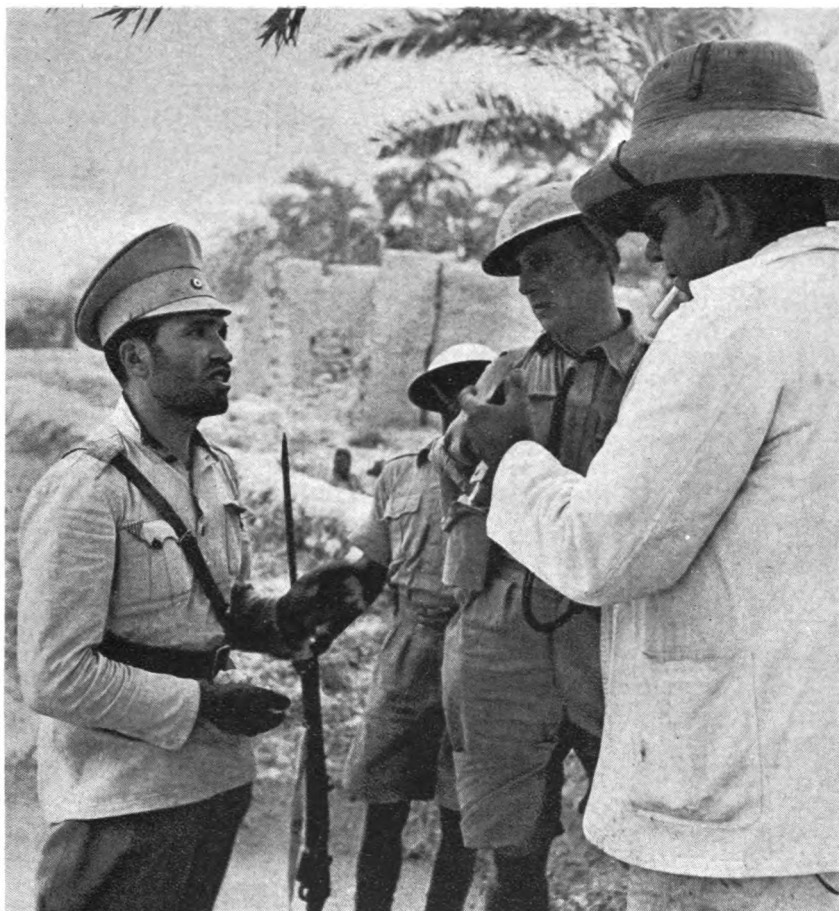
Maqil was on the wrong side of the river from the Persian aspect, but it was not outside consideration as a terminus of a route to Russia. The railway line to Baghdad, now being operated with lavish, vigorous and comprehensive assistance from the Army, was thoroughly reliable. At Baghdad wagons could be put across the Tigris by ferry and hauled thence to Khanaqin, where the highway to Tabriz, such as it was, began. The ferry limited the haul over this route to 900 tons a day, and at this nearly desperate time an extra 900-ton facility was worth having. The objection was that the Army had not come to Iraq exclusively to act as Pickfords. Communications in Iraq were being developed because they were needed to supply operational forces, forces which might have to be quadrupled in a matter of days. Indeed, Paiforce was so hard up for operational port facilities that the construction of a new seven-berth emergency port with rail connection had been started at Umm Qasr, fifty miles south of Maqil on the Zubair river. On the face of it, the use of Maqil for supplies to Russia would be one more blow to the Supplies and Transport units, the Ordnance units, the Engineer units, the Postal units, to all the thousands of Indian and

British soldiers who were struggling against unimaginable handicaps to perform their proper function of serving an army in the field.

There was no single solution to this problem. A dozen solutions were put into practice simultaneously and at furious speed.

On the Iraq side, an ambitious programme of construction was started with a view to increasing to 6,000 tons a day the clearance capacity of the line from Maqil. The track was to be doubled as far as Samawa. (This project was later abandoned when it was found that new crossing stations had made a double track superfluous.) From Samawa a new line was to be built to Karbala, which was already the terminal of a branch from Hindiya, and from Hindiya to Baghdad a second track was to be built to standard gauge, so that military stores could be railed right through from depots in the Hindiya area to Mosul. To circumvent the bottle-neck created by the ferry at Baghdad, it was planned to make much greater use of the Tigris. A barge wharf was built on the east bank at Baghdad, with a railway link to the Khanaqin line. But barges were scarce and their movement slow. To cut off a corner, a new railway line was started to connect Kut, then a very elementary lighter-port on the Tigris, with Baquba, on the Baghdad-Khanaqin line; the new section, which from London would stretch to Newport in Monmouthshire, was built in seven months, and when it was finished more than 200 miles of barge-haul were saved. This route—barge to Kut, rail to Khanaqin, road onwards through Persia—was to make a very large contribution to the total Russian lift.

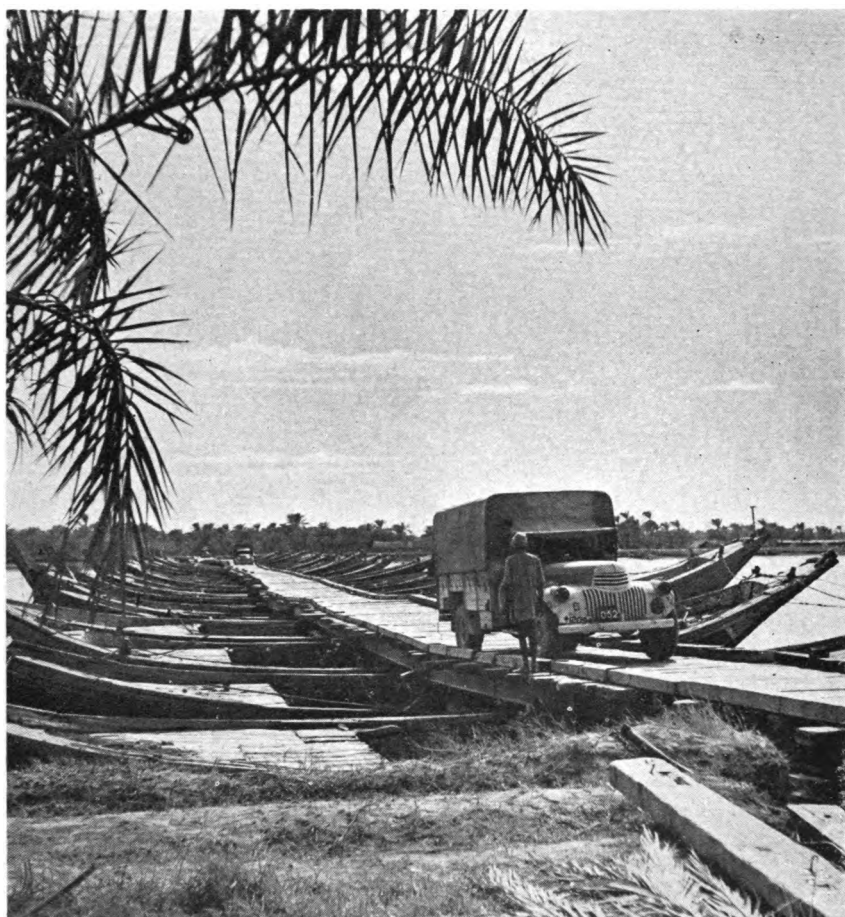
Meanwhile, the ports in Persia were being developed. Bushire, which it was practically impossible to convert into a deep-water port, was reorganized by Army Movements and the Ministry of War Transport, with assistance from Inland Water Transport. At Bandar Shahpur, when it had been tidied, three new berths were put in hand by contractors and the railway terminal layout was completely remodelled. But it was plain that when the Trans-Iranian railway had been fully developed it could never be fed—from the ships now crowding towards Persia—solely through the one pathetic port to which the builders had brought it. Ahwaz, some seventy miles up the line, seemed to be the clue, and since the river route to this point was in the nature of an obstacle course it followed that Ahwaz must, so to speak, be brought nearer to the deep water of the Shatt al Arab. This meant, in practice, that a railway line had to be built between Ahwaz and Khorramshahr, a distance, keeping clear of the Karun, of about 120 kilometres, and later on another line was laid to the barge wharves in Tanuma Basin, which was close to Maqil on the left bank. This programme, which included the construction of the necessary passing-stations and terminal developments, was not a simple one. The flat country over which the lines passed obviated the need for cuttings and high embankments, but the risk of flood involved very skilful planning and many culverts and



A Persian officer is interviewed. After the brief campaign, Persia and Britain came into full alliance and the old cordiality between their soldiers was renewed.



A casualty at the outset of the Persian Campaign. Australian naval forces sank the warship *Babr*, whose guns were threatening the Indians at Khorramshahr.



This floating bridge was built on native craft over the Shatt al Arab, near Basra. Some of the British columns passed over it during their advance into Persi



The successful conclusion of a crucial undertaking in the Persian Campaign. Indian



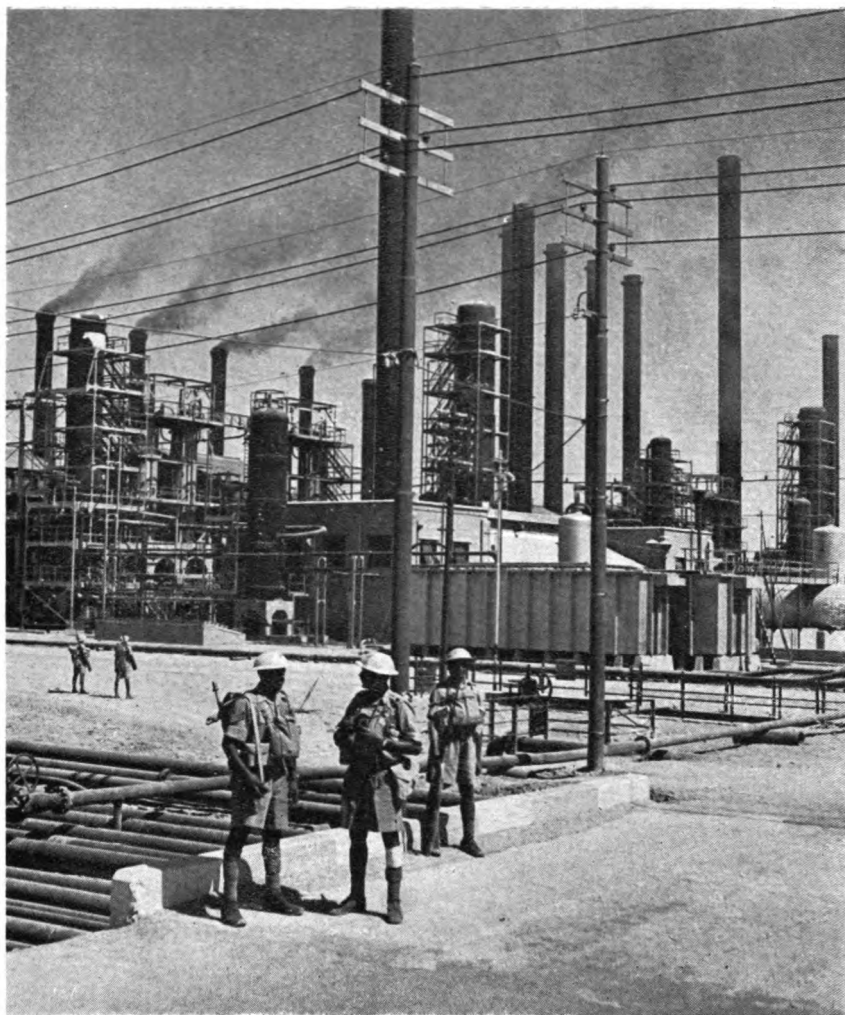
troops take over one of the world's largest oil refineries, on the island of Abadan.



Patrolling the great pipeline which carries oil across the Persian desert. Britain could



not have continued the war without the oil which she obtained from Persia and Iraq.



Twenty-four hours after the entry of our troops the oil refinery at Abadan was working once again at full pressure. Here, soldiers guard the giant installation.

bridges had to be built. The Transportation Staff was chronically below establishment. The available number of Indian Railway Construction Companies, which were simultaneously creating a vast web of sidings about the sprawling depots of Shu'aiba, was totally insufficient for the amount of skilled work demanded, and they had to place a great deal of reliance on indigenous personalities, some of whom were uninstructed in the laws of cause and effect, of hygiene, ownership and truth. Sleepers had to come from the forests of Northern Persia, essential stores from overseas often failed to arrive by the expected date. Yet the jobs were always finished close to the time scheduled. While this work was in progress, Khorramshahr itself was being developed; with great difficulty, since the glutinous bed of the Shatt al Arab made it necessary to use piles of peculiar length. The plan for extending the jetty to provide six extra berths was taken over at an early stage by American civil contractors, while the Army concentrated on building the necessary sidings; the actual working of the docks, as they developed, was entrusted to men of the Indian Docks Maintenance Companies and Docks Operating Companies who had already proved their high skill at Maqil and elsewhere; while the A.I.O.C., who contributed to the solution of almost every problem, supplied powerful cranes. At Failiyah Creek, a mile and a half up-river, a lighterage berth was built and linked to the railway. The fulfilment of all these plans, which was accomplished by a great variety of specialist units working under 'shock-troop' conditions, extended over many months; when they were completed, the railway line to Russia was fed from the sea through three mouths instead of one.

But this was comparatively a long-term solution. The ships could not wait, and the planning staff, the surveyors, the engineers, the constructional companies, the Engineer Stores officers had to accept that overriding axiom. If this had not been a war job, if the defeat of the Allies had not been so very close, they might reasonably have protested. "You are asking us", they might have said, "to create a system of ports with elaborate rail connections which will function as well as any in Europe or America for the movement of enormous tonnages. We start almost from scratch. We are in a country where most of the few existing communications might have been devised by the firm of Heath Robinson and Gilbert. Everything we require has to be specially ordered and brought to us, often across fifteen thousand miles of sea. We are short of men, our living conditions are rudimentary, we have to work in the open air in a desolate country and a climate of exceptional cruelty. Yet all we ask is that you keep out of our way. Give us just six months. Dump the cargo somewhere else—anywhere except on the wharves which we have got to enlarge or the surrounding areas where we are obliged to pull up all the sidings and relay them on a more intelligent plan. Give us six months of peace and we will finish the

job." But in 1941 peace was also in short supply. The cargoes had to be cleared whether the docks were being taken to pieces or not. It was for the Army to find some way of doing two entirely different jobs at the same time in the same place, and avoiding chaos; to regulate, to dovetail, to improvise on the largest scale; which has, in fact, always been the business of the Army.

A very large part in the solution was played by barges. In broad terms, a ship can be unloaded twice as quickly if it is unloaded on both sides at once; which means, when she is lying at a wharf, having barges or pontoons to make what is tantamount to a floating wharf on the other side. Again, if all the berths at a port are occupied by ships unloading, barges can be used to clear ships which are standing off. There are factors limiting these methods. The first, plainly, is the supply of barges, and also of tugs or other means of moving them. The second is that the barges themselves have to be unloaded, and if the supply is short the turn-round must be accelerated. This means that barge wharves have to be provided close to where the ships are discharging, and these wharves must have clearance facilities, preferably railway sidings. The work of the barges was not limited, in Persia and Iraq, to ferrying goods from ship to shore. It has been seen already that they were used on long hauls which helped to relieve the pressure on the railways. Long trips like these aggravated the problem of barge-supply: the hours occupied in moving up the Tigris were hours lost to ship clearance, they might mean hours in which the urgently needed ships lay idle. It was essential, then, to accelerate the movement of river traffic, and this could only be done by doctoring the river itself, which in the absence of such attention had always been in a state of shifting colic throughout its several hundred miles. All these complex matters came within the scope of a branch of the Army called I.W.T. (Inland Water Transport).

CHAPTER XVII

THE CONQUEST OF THE RIVERS

WHEN it started business in October 1941 I.W.T. had only three officers, and its fleet numbered seventy craft, which were hired with their crews from local traders. These vessels did good work, but their construction and habits were tuned to oriental life, which has never been infected with the Western craze for hustle. The Iraq Government gave energetic assistance, requisitioning for the Army all the graceful mihailas and other river-worthy craft which were to be found: craft which were excellently suited to carry a few cases of dates and a goat or two from Al Qurna to Al Azair, with occasional stops for baling and recaulking. And with this rather peculiar collection of derelicts I.W.T. had shifted, by the end of the first four months, about 150,000 tons. At the same time they had laid the foundations for a very large development. An I.W.T. camp had been opened at Khosrowabad for the men who were arriving in small numbers from India and the United Kingdom. In open boats, and living under the most primitive conditions, small parties of surveyors traversed the length of the Tigris to Baghdad and of the Karun to Ahwaz, diagnosing the principal disorders of these waterways, while other surveyors were planning the base workshops establishment at Basra. For the fleet as it grew would not be able to survive on local repair resources. With such simple apparatus as could be found in the medieval confusion of Ashar strange surgery had been performed; launches which seemed to have breathed their last were made to work again, a Turkish gunboat which since the previous war had lived in genteel retirement as a houseboat found herself trudging up the Shatt al Arab with a train of lighters in tow. But brilliant improvisation would not suffice to clear gigantic cargoes: there would never be an adequate number of craft to fulfil the programme with a margin of leisure, and no craft must ever lie idle for the lack of means to repair it.

By degrees the fleet was augmented. The A.I.O.C. lent twelve tugs from their own fleet. America sent more of the remarkable 200-horsepower Eureka launches which had already served as assault landing craft and were now to be used as auxiliary tugs. From America came also the prefabricated wooden pontoons which were assembled at Kuwait, an ancient centre of Arab boat-building (where I.W.T. were later to build their own boats), and thence towed up into the Shatt al Arab. India gave twin-screw tugs, 500-ton barges, and, to augment the tug fleet, a small fleet of paddle-steamers which had hitherto plied a decorous civilian trade upon the Ganges and the Brahmaputra.

These paddle-steamers had a draught of 6 ft. forward and 6 ft. 6 in. aft, with 2 ft. freeboards, and their journey of some 4,000 sea-miles from Calcutta to Basra, escorted as far as Bombay by H.M.I.S. *Pansy* under command of a Lieutenant, R.I.N.V.R., was a curious adventure. The decks were specially boarded for the voyage, sea-rudders were fitted and the paddles bolted solid to the wheels, but this hardly made them into ocean-going steamers. One, indeed, failed to get farther than Calcutta Roads, and one was sunk by a Japanese submarine. ("An enemy submarine", said the grave Naval orders under which the convoy sailed, "is not to be considered a superior force and is to be attacked vigorously on sight.") For this purpose each of the steamers was provided with two rifles (returnable) and 100 rounds.) Each could carry coal for 850 miles, which was roughly the distance from Karachi to Bahrein, and just 22 tons of drinking-water, while the after-peaks were filled with water for extra boiler-feeds. They also carried live-stock as rations. One of them, the *Chakrata*, was commanded by an Army officer, Captain Martin, I.E., who had an English sub-lieutenant, R.I.N.V.R., as his First Officer and an Indian midshipman; the engineers and firemen were Indian soldiers; the carpenter was Chinese; and the remainder of the crew was made up of Indian seccunnies, bhandarries, trimmers, sweepers and lascars, mostly from Chittagong. In his private log Captain Martin noted, a few days out from Karachi: "Forepeak full of water and leaking into chain-locker. Ship pitching heavily and shipping water. Slow ahead. . . . Midnight, heavy westerly swell and strong wind and rough sea. Ship again pitching heavily and shipping more water. Slow ahead on engines. . . . 4 p.m. Wind and swell increasing. 6.30 p.m. Eased down to Slow. Ship pitching and straining heavily. . . ." The paddles were continually getting loose and having to be rebolted. The *Almora* ran out of water and had to be towed by the *Hirvati*. And the goats rather sensibly died. But in a little over three weeks' sailing the depleted convoy reached the end of its journey.

With the arrival of more craft came the need for men to handle them. The Iraqi living close to the great rivers are skilful watermen, and the coastal Persians have no small reputation as sailors, as pilots, and even as divers. But this pool of experienced labour was very soon exhausted, and lightermen are not trained easily. The call had been sent out for men who could handle river craft, and India was not slow to answer it with river-dwellers of her own, chiefly Bengalis whose whole life was spent on boats and whose livelihood was to work them. These men had to face extremes of climate which they had never dreamed of, and there was much for them to learn: the ways of the Army, which knows no closing-time when there are cargoes to be shifted; the ways of the Tigris and Karun, which will spread themselves across the desert till their original course is scarcely discernible, and will then peter away

until there is hardly a channel left for a barge to follow. To tame these rivers India sent her professional bandallers, men who work in open boats or up to their waists in the water itself, planting 'bandals' (or barriers) of bamboo and reed matting which will guide the stream into a narrow and deepening channel. And there came from India dredgermen, and deep-sea sailors for the long sea hauls to Kuwait and Masira Island, to Sharja and Bahrein; many hundreds of technicians in a score of trades; and some men from the north of Assam who, when they arrived, looked like neither soldiers nor watermen, but could shoot a sandgrouse on the wing with bows and arrows which they made on the spot. From the West came the men of Britain's rivers to meet them, hardened lightermen who could handle their barges in the awkward currents of the Thames estuary and through the crowding traffic of the Pool; while Birmingham, Aberdeen and Bristol sent fitters and welders, tinsmiths, copper-smiths and carpenters, electricians and marine engineers. These, in the great repair sheds which were starting to rise at Basra, had to mesh their work with that of Indians speaking nine different languages, of Persians and Iraqi; while another 400 technicians spoke the several languages of their native China.

To take hold of this great concourse of peoples, trades and languages, and build them into a working team required singular leaders. They were forthcoming. At the head of them all was quite a young man, Colonel Sudbury, who arrived as Director of Inland Water Transport in September 1941. He had started his professional life as a chemist, and had been traffic manager for the firm of Tate and Lyle; with intellectual powers of a high order he combined a phenomenal capacity for drive. He was joined in November by a man of entirely different personality who shared with him what may be regarded as the hallmark of all the outstanding Paiforce figures: a total incapacity to believe in impossibility. Colonel Pennant, at the approximate age of 60, was settling down to a life of herculean labour combined with unvarying enjoyment. He had done a few jobs already. He had been a master mariner who—they had said in the Mercantile Marine—could take the *Queen Mary* over the Niagara Falls and then back over the same course. He had been to every country in the world except India, building a harbour here, a railway there, a chain of aerodromes where one happened to be wanted. He had shot a bear in the jungle ("Very silly thing to do—did it without thinking"), he had been traffic superintendent for a colliery company, he had personally taken the rusty engines out of antique Fords to make them drive home-made river launches, he had given—upon request—acceptable advice on nautical matters to a British admiral. This sufficiently varied experience of life was not without its use in the Persian Gulf: for there was no technical question, from the lashing of baggage on a Chevrolet to the layout of wharf sidings, to which he could not supply the answer.

When a 60-ton locomotive had to be taken up the river he said that it could be carried athwart two pontoons; when experts pointed out that the pontoons would tip together and deposit the locomotive in the water he replied that they wouldn't. They didn't. When the locomotive had to be put ashore the experts proved to the Colonel by means of formulæ and diagrams that a 100-ton crane would be required. He replied that he would run it ashore on a pair of rails. Since it seemed impossible to make him understand the scientific objections to this scheme, the experts went quietly away to signal for the crane. When they returned the locomotive was on terra firma and the Colonel, who had quite forgotten the foolish incident, was several hundred yards across the desert prospecting for a suitable railway-line.

Under these two men, and the diversely experienced officers who served as their staff, the I.W.T. force grew (and worked at full pressure all the time it was growing) till it became at last the largest centrally administered unit in Paiforce and probably the largest in the Army, with approximately 200 officers, 600 British other ranks, and 12,000 soldiers and civilians of Indian and other nationalities. But as sub-units reached a high point of efficiency they were moved to supply the urgent needs of other theatres, and there was never enough, in craft or in men. To the sweating lightermen the procession of ships up the Shatt al Arab seemed to be unbroken, and the life or death of Russia depended on what they carried, and in Newcastle and Baltimore the wharfingers were shouting for the ships to return. So these watermen, with the crane-drivers and the stevedores, their partners, laboured night and day. They lived roughly, building their own camps as they arrived, snatching a meal if the work on hand allowed it. The air of the Gulf, which feels like the inside of a laundry, became so permanent an experience that they could scarcely believe there were still fresh breezes which blew across the Brahmaputra and the Thames. And by the end of their first twelve months they had shifted 680,000 tons.

The demands on their labour constantly increased. There was high-octane spirit to be carried from Abadan to the various railheads on the Shatt al Arab. There was the local grain traffic to be handled (for since the Army had all the craft the Army alone could handle it), and in the Gharraf river district alone I.W.T. carried for the tribesmen 60,000 tons of grain in one season, four times the tonnage they had ever lifted themselves. But planning proved equal to these demands by multiplying several times the work which any one lighter could do. A system of traffic control had been organized. Barges which sank were salvaged on a system as precise as that which R.E.M.E. used for the recovery of vehicles. And the work of the dredgers and the bandallers, despite all the knavery which the Tigris used to defeat it, was bearing fruit: in one stretch of river between Amara and Kut, where there are

fifteen miles of shoal water, the creation of a reliable channel had reduced the standard passage-time from five days to six hours.

On Dockyard Island, at Ashar, a little township of workshops was rising. Not without travail. The island was reached by a single bridge which the Sappers had built in the last war; its roads were tracks feet deep in mud, it was covered with squatters most reluctant to remove from the slough of discomfort in which they were embedded. On the miry surface it was extremely difficult to lay beds firm enough to take heavy machinery. The buildings were imported in sections, and when the sections were laid out only the blacksmith's shop was found to be complete; then it was discovered that the number of bolts delivered was hopelessly short of requirement, and when Iraq had been scoured in vain for bolts the joints had to be welded or riveted. But as soon as any building had reached a recognizable shape it was put into service, and before long there was no kind of boat repair or small-scale production which could not be undertaken at Ashar. There were slipways and barge inspection shops, steam and Diesel sections, sections for motor-launch repair and for fleet maintenance; there were plating, welding and electrical sections, foundries, tinsmiths', coppersmiths' and carpenters' shops; there was a section devoted to the repair of I.W.T.'s own motor vehicles. The roads were being graded for heavy traffic, the island gradually assumed the functional shape of a British shipyard. Though not precisely that appearance. For everything was happening at once, and as one man in just a pair of khaki trousers was working on his lathe, another with the Arab dishdasha, keffia and agal was riveting the roof above his head, while behind him a Kurdish coolie with a stack of deals on his shoulders was being directed by a lance-naik in the headdress of a Punjabi Mussulman. On the bank of the Shatt al Arab a line of naked Arab boys stood gazing with cheerful interest at the vast new complication which had taken the place of huts and palms: the compressors, the concrete mixers, the men in boiler suits and topees, the dynamo which dangled overhead from the arm of a floating crane. Across the immemorial stench of marshland drifted the odours of lubricant, of scorched rubber and bitumen. And through the noise of hammers on steel, the rumbling of the foundry, came the voices of Foochow and Chin-Kiang in a ripple of plaintive song.

At Kut, with its crumbling trenches and rusted wire, its one small strip of green guarding with loveliness the bodies of British soldiers, the somnolence of more than twenty years had given place to frantic animation. The swarm of coolies on the new and still extending wharves spilt over to the bustling railway yards, to the stacks of bricks and deal and girders which the Indian Sappers were turning into dockyard sheds and workshops. The jostle spread to the new camps sprawling out into the desert, and to the river itself, where the Tynesiders and

Chittagonians threaded their Eureka's between impatient mihailas and lumbering pontoons. At one end of the wharf a tow-haired shrimp of a man with his fore-and-aft on one ear, a corporal's stripes pinned crookedly to his denim, throws laconic orders in the incisive tones of Battersea to the Iraqi helmsmen, the Kharag pilots, the lascars of Bhagalpur; and in some mysterious fashion these obey him. At Khorramshahr, where the Madrassi in six-tonners squeezed and hooted past the two-horse arabanas, the sunlit nightmare was larger and fiercer still; for here each ocean ship was a vortex of traffic, and while each lighter slipped into the place of the last, to leave scarcely a pause in the labour of discharging, bellums and bumboats nosed in towards the towering hulls to sell a bunch of dates and an egg or two to Mexican or Negro sailors. Between the sidings, where newly assembled wagons were jangling off towards Ahwaz, a flock of sheep sought hopefully for pasture but with small reward; for where tufts of desert grass had grown the builders of the new wharves, the men of the railway construction companies, the workshop companies, docks sections, docks operating groups, docks maintenance companies, went ceaselessly about their business. From dawn till nightfall, and then in the light of the new high arc-lamps, the winches squealed, the new cranes hummed and turned; above the chittai shelter where tired clerks from the Bombay offices were hammering on their typewriters the Beta packs swung high through the air and down on to the waiting trucks, a clutch of metal bars hung quivering and then dropped slowly to the stacks, where oil and hides, strip brass for cartridges, a Fordson tractor and bales of serge stood hard against the heaps of builders' sand, a pile of sleepers, stacks of corrugated iron. Through this borderless conglomeration of material and machines, men who a few weeks earlier had worked for a farrier in Ludlow or had fired a local engine in Dumbartonshire pursued their way without concern, across the wharves and sidings, between the wagons and the date-palms, disregarding the Lurs and the Ashari watermen who jostled against them; on into the narrow, odoriferous streets, talking quietly of an Armenian bloke who'd said he could get a metal drill from Amara; on, streaming with sweat, past the tawdry shops and the moaning music of chaikhanas; and on into the camp, with its military smells and rough-hewn tidiness, wondering if there was just a chance of any mail. One hour off, then back on the job again, for the ships were waiting for discharge; the queue of lighters waited for a vacant berth up in Failiyah Creek; the coolies on the wharves were waiting for more wagons, the wagons waited for the clearance of a siding where another train of wagons waited for an engine; and up in the North the Russians were waiting.

To the ignorant eye it was a vast confusion, but no part of this entanglement was without a joining thread which men were following. Elderly British captains were sweating in the quayside offices, spectacled

THE CONQUEST OF THE RIVERS

subahdars with little books picked their way about the wharves and into the ships. They knew just what they were doing, these and a hundred like them. Just as they ordered it the ships would be cleared, the trucks would move on, every man in the polyglot multitude of tradesmen and labourers would get his proper pay. It was all within control.

When they reached the peak of their capacity I.W.T. could shift in any month, in harbour lighterage alone, 120,000 tons.

CHAPTER XVIII

TOWER OF BABEL

PLAINLY, this vast expenditure of men's resource and labour would have been useless if the cargoes had silted up at some bottle-neck farther north. And the railway line, as the British found it, was a bottle-neck in the most accurate use of that term.

The Trans-Iranian Railway had been working for a little over four years. It was a monument to the imagination and driving energy of Reza Shah Pahlevi, and the Persian people had every reason to be proud of it, for they themselves had supplied most of the labour for its construction and they, with a small population living in every circumstance of hardship, had found every rial of the thirty million pounds which it had cost.

It had been built by engineers of several nations, including Great Britain (the firm Consortium Kampsax of Copenhagen being the principal contractors), and it represented one of the greatest feats of railway construction in the world. From the mud-flats of Bandar Shahpur it crossed 150 miles of desert and then penetrated the fantastic mountains of Luristan. For more than a hundred miles the steeply climbing track wound its way through gorges and across vertiginous bridges, flanked by snow-capped peaks which rose to 12,000 feet, by coloured layers of rock that looked like the work of crazed confectioners, metallic mountains resembling American skyscrapers and weirdly coloured mountains like settings for Wagnerian opera, and where gorges no longer gave it passage it bored its way through more than 130 tunnels, some of them coiled within the rock so that the line emerged directly above its former path, till it reached a height of 7,000 feet. Then it dropped three thousand feet over undulating country to Tehran, some 500 miles from its start. From there the main section traversed another 300 miles of tangled country, crossing the Elburz mountains on gradients as steep as 1-in-36, with another series of magnificently fashioned bridges, tunnels and spirals, and at last descended to the mud-flats of Bandar Shah, where it reached the Caspian Sea. There were also branch lines under construction which were intended to go from Tehran to Tabriz, in the direction of the Caucasus; eastward to Meshed; and south-east to Yezd. At Tehran there were large railway workshops. The Persians had none of the experience which is built up in years of railway operating and transmitted from one generation to the next, and yet, with some help from foreign specialists employed on short contracts, they were operating this astonishing railway themselves. And it worked. There can be few

equal instances of plucky enterprise by a pastoral and remotely situated people.

But in October 1941 the line would carry only 200 tons a day of paying loads. Before it could serve as the main southern artery for allied aid to Russia it had somehow to be made to carry twelve times that tonnage in supplies to Russia alone.

This meant, first of all, the need for a very great increase of rolling-stock and locomotives. But there is a limit to the number of trains which can safely be run in any period over a single track. The track could not be doubled; that would have been a task on almost the same scale as the original construction, and would have taken some years. The conjuring trick could only be performed by making additional crossing stations, marshalling stations and sorting yards. That was not all. The use of more locomotives, hauling greater loads, meant that more fuel would be required at points along the line and—in the stupendous heat of the Persian summer—very much more water. Again, the elementary signalling equipment which sufficed for controlling the movement of widely-spaced traffic would be totally inadequate when the density increased. (It was discovered, in fact, that the signalling lines, which included pieces of barbed wire, were “nearing the logical end of their efficiency”.) So new water installations would have to be made, and completely new telegraph and block-signalling equipment constructed. And there were many other requirements, smaller severally but equally essential.

This was very much too large a programme for the Persians to tackle by themselves, with their limited resources. It was clear that the task required, to begin with, a Director of Transportation with peculiar qualifications: he must be an experienced railwayman who knew how to work without any of the conveniences which a railwayman expects in Europe; he must be familiar with the ways of the Army, since he would have to work within the Army frame; and he must be deeply imbued with the Paiforce contempt for obstacles. (In practice, it was to be found that these were only the first of the essential qualifications.) Sir Godfrey Rhodes, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., was General Manager of the Kenya and Uganda railways and harbours; he had served with great distinction in the earlier of the Great Wars; in the later fifties, he was a dangerous centre-forward at hockey, he saw nothing irregular in working himself for eleven hours a day and—if conditions were agreeable—dancing through most of the night. Above all, he was a man who could exercise an almost superhuman patience with people whose mental structure was less highly developed than his own. On the 1st October, 1941, a talent-spotter from the Adjutant-General's Branch put Sir Godfrey into the uniform of a Brigadier and the first available aeroplane.

There was already a group of seven transportation officers in Tehran,

including Lt.-Col. H. A. Davis, R.E., who as transportation adviser to H.B.M. Minister had made a preliminary survey of the position, and Lt.-Col. A. R. Mais, O.B.E., R.E., who had been engaged on the original construction of the railway and now assumed responsibility for the large engineering programme. New locomotives and rolling-stock were on their way from the United Kingdom. The first intention was to assist the Persian Management only with a very small staff and with a certain number of Sappers in the workshops and as crews for the new locomotives. This plan had to be radically altered when it was found that staffs in all departments were inadequate to deal with a great increase in traffic, but it remained the British policy to leave the railway in Persian hands, giving only guidance and practical assistance where they were needed. It was not an easy policy to follow. In the early stages, while many members of the regular staff gave splendid co-operation, some were naturally suspicious of interference, particularly by men whose experience was far greater than their own, and a few were covertly or openly hostile, for German propaganda had been at work and Herr Mayer was still at large in Persia. But in most departments patience gradually wore away hostility, particularly when the British were found to be much concerned about the Persians getting their proper pay, and the practical education which the British gave in the technique of railway operation may eventually be counted as one of the major contributions made by the Army to Anglo-Persian friendship.

For, as could be expected, there was not a little that the Sappers were able to teach their new colleagues. Few branches of applied science are more ramified, more complex than railway operation; a long book could be written about the various kinds of knowledge and labour involved in sending a single train from Waterloo to Reigate, and the interlocking of all these activities has the beauty of an elaborate machine in motion. Brought up where all the parts of the machinery functioned almost perfectly, the British railwaymen now found themselves, with a certain agitation, dealing with machinery in which some parts were missing or not functioning at all.

There was, for example, no special department to deal with rates, claims and thefts. There were no train control offices, no system for controlling the distribution of wagons, no arrangement for classified yard working. Technical stores were controlled by an official known as the *Chef-de-Traction*, but the buying of such stores came under a special Purchase Department with which the Accounts Department had rights of interference, and the serious shortage of all stores was aggravated by clumsy methods of distribution. The freight time-table was largely ornamental. The absence of a 'shopping programme' by which locomotives are maintained in good condition meant that when the British arrived half the locomotives were awaiting repair and the remainder were in a parlous state.

In many of the details of operation, also, the existing practice was discovered to be unsound. Wagon doors were fastened with bits of string and seals of soft lead, which would have offered delicious opportunities for far less enterprising thieves than those which haunted this railway line. In the locomotive workshops every bearing connecting the coupling-rod brass was bored smaller than the pin, then fitted into the rod, and finally scraped on to each individual bearing, each rod being lifted manually on to the pin for every trial: this occupied the services of no fewer than 49 men on the fitting benches. Among the train crews were young men far too inexperienced to handle powerful machinery. Brakesmen had a habit of screwing down their handbrakes and going to sleep, a practice which did nothing to improve the wheels or the rails, for which the firm of Krupp had not supplied the best of their steel. At Sefid Dasht it was the agreeable custom of certain drivers and firemen of second locomotives (in a double-headed train) to alight for a glass of tea in a chaikhana at the lowest loop, leaving their locomotive to make its own way, with the regulator open, to the station at the top loop, where, by moving smartly across three hundred yards of country, they resumed its management. Such methods were discovered by British railwaymen with considerable surprise.

Everywhere the newcomers were faced with the appalling difficulty of language, which made it hard to get the fullest co-operation even from those most anxious to give it. The Persian language has peculiarities of idiom which make it especially difficult to the foreigner. The word *farda*, for example, is translated in the dictionary as 'tomorrow', but its colloquial meaning may be 'sometime this week' or 'within the next fortnight or so, provided that my uncle in Khatunabad does not die, in which case I should naturally have to go and make the funeral arrangements'. Again, the very popular word *Inshallah*, meaning 'God willing', is generally found to have a philosophic rather than a theological significance. Both these words were in frequent use throughout the railway system, and were heard a great deal when questions of employees' pay were raised. The system of a small private remuneration passing between two parties to a public contract is not unknown in the western world; throughout the eastern it comes almost within the borders of respectability. In general, the condition of the pay system in the Iranian Railway, as the British found it, could be described as one of permanent fluidity. This did not make for good discipline among the staff, who suffered further discouragement from the fact that men in junior appointments sometimes got more pay than their seniors, and that promotion was exceedingly capricious. Many of them, indeed, could not see the smallest chance of being promoted at all. Moreover, the disciplinary powers of subordinate officials were extremely small. The whole organization was highly centralized: quite unimportant matters had to be referred to the Director-General of the Railway or

even to the Minister of Roads and Communications. All the workings of the administration were wrapped in many coils of red-tape which, though a good deal frayed and tangled, effectively prevented any excess of speed.

These were some of the difficulties which Brigadier Rhodes and his staff had to face when the Treaty of Alliance with Persia gave the Allies the right to develop all means of communication in co-operation with the Persian Government. The task demanded not merely an initial display of patience, tact and occasional firmness: it required the continuous exercise of these qualities through a period of many months.

The language trouble also complicated all the British dealings with the Soviet representatives, which were bound in any case to require very able management on both sides. The object of both parties was exactly the same: their approach to the problem not always identical. The Russians were fighting with their backs to the wall. Already a great part of their country was in German hands, they had seen the work of years destroyed, thousands of their families were living—if living it could be called—under the German tyranny. It would have been a miracle if they had never shown impatience, if they had never failed to understand the difficulties or thought that the methodical building up of a system to stand the strain of vast tonnages was too slow for their immediate needs. There were, again, differences in the administrative machinery and conceptions by which each party functioned: the Russians, working within a centralized system, had smaller powers than the British for making decisions, and this fact imposed delays which the British on their side found very irksome. Some of the problems to be solved inevitably had political aspects. And finally, the U.S.S.R., still harder pressed for technical experts than Britain, was obliged to include in their Persian Delegation some members who were not in the true sense railwaymen. Here, then, was further need for forbearance and for skill of a diplomatic kind. Meetings went on for hour after hour, at a time when every hour was precious. Lt.-Col. H. Robbins, lately European Traffic Manager of the Cunard-White Star Company, acted as interpreter; he had been liaison officer with the Russian Cavalry in the previous war. "At the end of one of these meetings", he has said, "my brain seemed to be working like an automatic filing cabinet: Russian in—English out: English in—Russian out. I could almost feel the rumble and the click." But there were other meetings of a less formal kind. The Russians above all things loved a party, and at parties they discovered that the British, who at conferences stuck to the point with such puritan tenacity, could laugh as loudly as they.

By long and patient negotiation the respective spheres of operation were settled: the British were to work south of Tehran and the Russians, with certain specified assistance, were to manage the still more difficult

northern section; they were to be given special facilities in the Tehran workshops, which the British were already reorganizing and developing. When the Russians understood the British method of leaving things as much as possible in Persian hands they quickly adopted it.

At all the lower levels officers and other ranks had likewise to be diplomatists as well as technicians. In the simpler and better phrase of a Sapper from Chesterfield, they had "to just keep kidding these blokes along". The technical qualifications of these Sappers were not always as high as the jobs strictly demanded. At a time when railwaymen were wanted in several theatres, and when railways in the United Kingdom were handling a much greater traffic under far more difficult conditions than ever in their history, it was not to be expected that any kind of specialist was to be had for the asking. So firemen and even cleaners had to drive locomotives, while a country stationmaster's clerk would find himself virtually supervising three or four stations. They accepted these duties without betraying the smallest anxiety, for they came of a stock which accepts responsibility, and among people who had not the same tradition they found their stature automatically increasing. The trouble was that there were never enough of them. It was precisely calculated that two Railway Operating Groups were required; by the end of 1942 it had only been possible to find one. Out of six Construction and Maintenance Companies required, only four had arrived. Only one Workshop Company and one smaller detachment were forthcoming where three Companies were needed. And there were similar shortages in almost every other department. It was nobody's fault: India had the Far Eastern war on her hands; in strategic planning Iraq was still bound to have priority over Persia; the men were just not there. The shortage was aggravated by the fact that many sub-units had to work in small detachments and every detachment means the employment of more men in guards and camp fatigues: while sickness, always in wait for Englishmen who come fresh to a Persian summer, reduced still further the number available for railway duties. The lack of vital stores was equally serious. Every theatre was making unprecedented claims on the Empire's resources.

The answer was found, as always, in the willingness of British soldiers to double their own capacity for work, and in improvisation. The German Ferrostaal locomotives, which, though inclined to be 'shy of steam', showed sturdy qualities, were intensively maintained to keep them running until War Department locomotives arrived to ease the burden. These in their turn required skilful doctoring, for, excellent as they were, they had not been designed for service under tropical conditions or for oil firing. The superheater elements, too long in the flues and too thinly fabricated, had to be altered. Injectors would not deliver water to the boiler when the temperature in the tender was above 103° Fahrenheit, and in Persia in the summer months the tank

temperatures were a great deal higher than that, even when the tanks had been painted white. Persian water corroded the water gauges, which had to be elaborately repaired, and put the automatic continuous blowdown apparatus (which keeps the boiler free from sediment) out of action; cylinder cocks burst; sand-boxes proved much too small—a dangerous drawback on mountain sections; and steam-pressure gauges would not stand up to temperatures in the region of 200° F. In time splendid Baldwin locomotives arrived from America and were landed at Failiyah Creek with a crane shifted from Ahwaz. These too had to be adapted: stronger screw couplings had to be substituted, and stronger draft springs to the tender rear drawbars; big-end and side rods had to be converted to grease lubrication, sanding gear made to operate by air pressure; parts of the brake lubrication system were altered and electric headlamps (which drivers badly needed in the long tunnel sections) were fitted. All this work brought so much pressure on the shops that it was impossible to organize them on a long-term basis, as the R.E. officers were longing to do; but at least there was system, where there had been none before, and as any system ceased to meet the needs of the moment it was promptly overhauled. “If only we could have our own chaps everywhere!” the officers repeated: men at every bench to lend a hand, to advise and encourage. Well, the extra men were not to be found. The few they had set about inventing a simpler kind of piston-rod packing; finding a new cure for fractured piston valve heads; making spanners, hammerheads, and piston-rod parting tackle from old rails, and packing-cord out of tennis nets bought from dubious dealers in the Tehran bazaar.

The shortage in wagons, particularly in braked wagons (of which a high proportion was needed because of the steep gradients), created problems of equal magnitude. Wagons were arriving in sections and were being put together—at first with riotous enthusiasm but later with quiet efficiency—by Persians working under a single British officer, Major T. Newman, M.B.E., R.E., in an old shed at Ahwaz, with compressors and riveters borrowed from the A.I.O.C.; but they were not fitted with brakes. In the latter half of 1942 braked wagons did begin to arrive from America, and it was hoped that as this fine stock was put into service the braking troubles would disappear; but these wagons at first proved insufficiently strong in brake gear and in their couplings for the peculiar strains which the mountain section imposed and could only be used on the more level sections. Solutions were found in the scientific control of wagon requirements and in introducing a proper system of yard working, whereby a Yard Supervisor knew at any moment exactly what was happening in every part of his yard and could keep a check on idle wagons and idle shunting locomotives. Since a great many of the pointsmen and shunters were illiterate, special methods had to be devised: painted signs were introduced for

the different 'roads' in the yard, and corresponding signs were chalked on wagons. These notions were received by the Persian checkers with eagerness and delight.

In every department similar developments went on at the same time. The chaotic handling of stores gradually gave place to a system, the running of every locomotive was scientifically logged. Time-tables and operating rules were re-planned on an entirely new basis, and here again colour was used to overcome the bugbear of language: since both British and Persian drivers had to work by Line Clear tickets, station-masters were made to show every driver a coloured card which immediately told him what kind of ticket he was receiving. A special officer was appointed to get food which Persian employees at remote stations could buy at prices within their slender means. Questions of pay, promotion and security of tenure for the Persian staff were all being vigorously pursued.

On the engineering side the huge programme, which included the new lines from Ahwaz to Khorramshahr and Tanuma, was steadily fulfilled. Here M. Karuse, the Persian Chief Engineer, gave whole-hearted co-operation and M. Hacklin, then Chief of Construction, proved an invaluable as well as a most courteous and enthusiastic adviser. In the yards at Andimishk, Ahwaz and Tehran the number of roads was doubled, while crossovers and shunting necks were re-constructed to conform with the new operating methods. Forty new crossing stations were made, some on gradients of 1-in-66, some by blasting, the Persians constructing the earthwork and the British laying the track, while a number of the existing loops were lengthened. The whole of the permanent way had, meanwhile, to be kept in sound condition, a task which was often dangerous and was made formidable by the shortage of sleepers and of gravel ballast. In all this work Indian sub-units, which came chiefly from Iraq, played an important part, but a veteran British Construction Company, survivors of the *Lancastria*, and diverted from Singapore early in 1942, after disembarkation had begun, also left its mark from Khorramshahr to Tehran in the form of new sidings, yards and buildings. A large building programme was achieved. The size of the erecting shops at Tehran was doubled, locomotive sheds, workshops, storehouses and offices were built. Up and down the line hutted camps were erected, since Rhodes adamantly refused to let his men freeze in a second Persian winter. And there were level crossings to be made, coal stages, loading ramps, inspection pits and military signal boards.

The supply of water for the locomotives was a continuous problem. Most of the information originally available proved to be wrong; it had been based on the recordings of an exceptional winter, and on reports from local people who were perhaps unskilled in imparting their knowledge. On the face of it, there should be enough water in

the Persian mountains to assuage the thirst of all the locomotives in the world: but a great proportion of it will (unless specially softened) rapidly destroy a locomotive's boiler, and the rest behaves perversely. It runs where it is difficult to get at; the volume alters extravagantly; in winter it may freeze. In the southern plain there is very little water at all, and agriculture rightfully makes heavy claims on what there is. When it is considered that there had hitherto been no organized system for keeping the water installations in good health it will not be found surprising that locomotives sometimes had to stand idle for over an hour in a mountain section while water was pumped up from the River Diz. Early in 1942 an ambitious water programme was put in hand and was carried out largely by the Persians themselves, while the existing plant was overhauled. But the fluctuations in natural supply never allowed any freedom from anxiety, and except in spring the water shortage made it impossible to plan traffic schedules exceeding eight double-headed trains a day.

Existing communications had to be almost entirely rebuilt; on the old system, when it worked, speakers generally found the lines crowded with many voices and it was the local custom for each to surmount this inconvenience by trying to shout louder than the rest; the new lines were planned in such a way as to prevent this. The cost of the scheme in materials was not small: from local stores alone two thousand poles, a hundred thousand insulators and insulator bolts, and sixty tons of wire were used. Brigadier Charlesworth, Chief Signals Officer in Iraq, first sent an Indian detachment which worked up from the Gulf to Ahwaz, erecting new concrete poles in the flooded area, and then constructed two pairs of lines along the new track from Ahwaz to Khorramshahr. A British Railway Telegraph Company, in conjunction with Indian Lines of Communication units, followed and worked simultaneously northward from Ahwaz and southward from Tehran, where the work had been pluckily started by Persians without technical experience. By the beginning of November 1942 the original construction programme, which was to give both telegraph and speech facilities over a distance greater than that from London to Berlin, had been completed, and the Signalmen were left with the task of maintaining the line in a continuous struggle against a destructive climate and people who seemed to be permanently short of copper wire.

In the earlier months the guarding of the line had to be left to local Dogberrys called the Amnieh. As the weight and value of cargoes increased this was found to be unsatisfactory, and though the Persian Government made great efforts to find troops for the purpose they were unable to do so. An Indian Garrison Company was therefore given the almost hopeless task of watching (and often fighting for) the security of the line in the mountain section between Dorud and Andimishk, and in December 1942 a battalion of Frontier Force Rifles came to take

over the protection of the whole line. The method was to put armed guards on every train, to establish small garrisons at certain vital points and continuously to patrol the track, while at a later stage men of the Field Security sections, linguists with specialized training in security tasks, travelled up and down the line with sharp eyes for impending trouble. These measures proved extremely effective: pilferage was reduced almost to a European level, and several minor acts of sabotage were forestalled.

But the duty was not a pleasant one for the Indian soldiers. They had expected the sharp experience of battle, and were ready to face it with all the traditional bravery of their race. Here they were asked for—and in full measure gave—courage of a different and perhaps harder kind. There are not a few men who would find it a nervous job to go through the long darkness of a spiral tunnel, even if it only meant standing pressed back against the wall as a goods-train passed. But for these soldiers it was a regular duty to patrol those tunnels with the knowledge that bandits might be following them or waiting to pick them off at the other end; for in these wild regions there are Lurs who will cheerfully risk their lives for the chance of getting a good service rifle. Some of the Indians did lose their lives, and a number were wounded, in this hellish game of hide-and-seek. And they had not much to return to at the end of the nightmare patrols. They lived, each little group, in tiny encampments beside the line, often in places where there was only just room for a pair of small huts between line and precipice, in a solitude only equalled by that of the little groups of Signalmen who looked after the telegraph lines. They were brought to these eyries on the freight-trains, and if the gradient was steep the driver dared not stop: so they jumped down from the moving train and their stores and equipment were thrown out after them. Sometimes a bundle, clumsily pitched, would roll to the edge of the camp site and go tumbling down into the gorge a hundred feet below; the Indians would stare mournfully after it and then, hearing the good-natured laughter of their colleagues on the departing train, would themselves burst out laughing. To passengers on the trains they were not the least of the marvels in this journey through stupendous spectacle: these tiny camps, often wrapped in snow, always perfectly tidy; with the little group of Indian soldiers, sometimes lined up as if for inspection, immaculate, with a flash of brilliant colour in their perfectly ordered head-dress; grave, steadfast with heroic patience. It was a bitter disappointment when some of these men, who were sent on a mountain warfare course and hoped then to fight the Japanese, found themselves back on railway duty again. Yet they never lost their equanimity or fortitude.

No part of the railway work would have been easy in ordinary climatic conditions. The climatic conditions of Persia are not ordinary. The northern winter is cruel even to those who have always lived

there; the temperature falls many degrees below zero, snow fastens thickly on the mountains and ferocious winds scream through the gorges, carrying snow and ice. In that frozen world men who had known only the sultry plains of South-East India had to live the life of soldiers for weeks at a stretch; in those merciless gales a soldier from Pembroke or Devon clung, sometimes weeping, to the top of a telegraph post, and managed somehow to climb down and trudge on through the snow to struggle up the next one. Summer brought heat which made the heat in most of India seem almost gentle. With one exception Dizful is the hottest inhabited place in the world—its people can only survive by living in caves—and Andimishk railway station, a few miles away, is hotter still. At this dividing point between the mountains and the plain hundreds of British soldiers lived in tents throughout the summer of 1942, with a couple of Indian Pattern tents for 'recreation', with no beer except the local version at 1s. 3d. a small bottle, with ice that was mostly water by the time it had travelled from Ahwaz. According to the Armenian Assistant-Chief of Movements it was the hottest summer for ten years. For weeks the shade temperature stayed at 130° F., and on a day when it fell to 112° a soldier noted in his diary 'nice and cool'. Water left outside a tent was too hot to wash with by the evening. At night hot winds blew continually upon men trying hopelessly to sleep. To get a little relief they dug the floors of their tents a foot or two below the ground (not knowing that when the floods came and washed away an entire depot they would be liable to drown in their holes), and one party actually pitched their tent across a stream, until they found that local residents were using it farther up for elementary hygiene. One man died on the day of their arrival, "making us feel", said a comrade with grim cheerfulness, "that our chances of survival were roughly equal to those of soldiers in battle". There were five deaths to follow. A Scotsman employed as a cook worked hard all morning, and said after dinner that he was "finding it a bit much". He stood under a shower all afternoon, and in the evening died.

But the trains got through. Not always on time. Locomotives running short of water sometimes had to leave their trains and go on alone to the tanks, fill up and return. On one occasion five successive pairs of locomotives failed, through injector trouble, to get a train through one of the tunnel sections. Yet the traffic programme was always fulfilled. "It was just a case", said one of the drivers, "of putting in a bit of extra time." In fact, a good deal of extra time. The strength of a railway operating company is only about 420 men, including clerks, drivers, fatigue men and cooks. This leaves perhaps 350 men for actual railway duties; when 80 of these are down with heat-stroke, and a crew of six has still to be found for every train (and many more for the other manifold duties of operation), the

labour problem becomes complex. The answer had to be found, for as summer blazed towards autumn the Germans were at the gates of Stalingrad, and it was given by men working to the very limit of their endurance.

"I have lived twenty continuous years in the tropics," Lt.-Col. Adcock has written in his reminiscences, "but never have I experienced such heat. At eight o'clock one morning in June 1942 I left Andimishk in a convoy. At eleven o'clock the British driver beside me in the cab of the lorry became unconscious and remained so for nearly four hours. . . . The bakelite cap of the thermos flask I had with me cracked with a loud report and the two halves shot apart." In such conditions the Sappers had to fire and drive the locomotives, and some of them in civil life had never been inside one. On the steepest gradients the crews had to walk beside the wheels scooping sand with their hands and throwing it on the rails to give extra grip for the wheels. Tunnels were the worst of their trials: Diesel-electric locomotives did not arrive till 1943, and when trains were hauled by two or sometimes three non-electric locomotives the crews were almost asphyxiated by the fumes. They had a trick for the job: as they approached a long tunnel the locomotive crews would stoke up and set the regulators, then they would put wet rags over their faces and get right down on to the step; but sometimes they lost consciousness, and sometimes the train would slip back, so that the business had to be repeated a second, a third, perhaps even a fourth time. On this work a man might do sixteen hours at a stretch, have five hours off and then start again.

The Russians needed the stuff and they were going to get it. A driver who had just recovered from dangerous heat-stroke managed to dodge the hospital staff and went straight back to the footplate of a locomotive scheduled for the run north from Andimishk. In one of the tunnels the boiler blew back; the driver, stunned and badly scorched, fell out beside the line. He staggered to the next station and another driver took the train on to Dorud.

By the end of 1942, when the target figure was more than doubled, the spade-work had been done; the line capacity had vastly expanded, every branch of the organization had taken shape to deal with the tremendous traffic still to come. Already the tonnages carried had steadily increased. "We were limited", an officer has said, "simply by our locomotive stock and by the proportion of rolling-stock equipped with air-brakes. With those limitations I don't think we could have lifted one ounce more than we did." Yet they were not at all content. "Wait", they said, "until the Diesel-electrics come! Then you will see the tonnage curve shoot upwards." They had looked ahead, not merely in day-dreams but in terms of machinery and stores. The plans for handling still larger loads had all been made, the necessary rolling-stock had been precisely calculated and put on order. But they needed

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a great replenishment of men as well as the electric locomotives and brake-vans. The work of multiplying the monthly lift nearly eight times had been done with never more than 120 officers or 3,900 Sappers and N.C.O.s.

CHAPTER XIX

SAND AND SNOW

AT no stage could the railway alone have dealt with the Russian lift, and since the explosion of a petrol train in one of the tunnels might have put the line out of action for weeks it would have been madness to depend on it exclusively. The brave start which the U.K.C.C. had made in road haulage by hiring local vehicles was to be vastly developed as new vehicles came into the country in sections and were put together in the American Truck Assembly Plants at Andimishk and Khorramshahr and the British Vehicle Assembly Unit at Rafidiya, near Shu'aiba. But this development depended on roads, and roads which in England would hardly have been thought adequate to serve the smallest villages could not carry the incessant traffic of large convoys.

It was first planned to develop the eastern routes leading to Kazvin from Khanaqin, Dorud and Andimishk, and the western route which goes from Bushire through Shiraz, Isfahan and Qum to Tehran. Later it was decided also to develop the route from Meshed, which lies near the north-east border of Persia, down to Zahidan and Mirjawa, at the south-west point of Afghanistan, to connect with an old railway line from Nokkundi which was to be rebuilt and to provide a land route from India. For the same purpose, an alternative route to Zahidan through Isfahan, Yezd and Kerman was to be improved. And finally, a transverse road was to be put in order between Malayer and Qum. The total length of roads comprised by this programme was 3,000 miles—the distance from Liverpool to New York.

The routes went through several of the highest passes in the world. Those to the east traversed hundreds of miles of desert where hard gravel tracks alternated with sand-dunes and with 'kavir'—dangerous ground covered with salt or with yellow slime. In the west the roads had a hard crown, about ten feet wide, made either with soling (large stones) or with a good deal of road metal well beaten in by the traffic of years: parts were the work of British Sappers in the previous war. But for years past the only maintenance these roads had received was from small parties working near their own villages who believed that the term 'road metal' meant a mixture of very fine stones with dirt, and the surface had become so corrugated that the motorist using them felt very much as if he was being shaken in a steam-operated sieve. Nearly everywhere the berms (sides) had been so worn away that to pass another vehicle was a dangerous enterprise, and many of the bridges and culverts were too narrow or were dilapidated and weak.

These roads, however, were almost good in comparison with those on the eastern side, where Irish bridges (paved fords) were the rule and where long sections running in the dry beds of streams had to be freshly constructed whenever the streams filled. As a basis of calculation it was assumed that these roads would have to carry a continuous stream of ten-ton lorries passing in both directions at an average density of three to the mile, and for this purpose the standard specification to be aimed at was a twenty-foot width of metalling with three-foot earth berms on both sides. Extra soling was to be laid where necessary.

Stone of varying qualities was to be had near parts of the roads. Water, generally, was not. A limited number of shovels and wheelbarrows was available. There were reputed to be nineteen rollers in Persia, but this proved to be a flight of fancy.

The first name that will always be associated with Persian roads in the second World War is that of Brigadier J. L. French, C.B.E., T.D., who was appointed Chief Engineer, North Persia (actually too restrictive a title), in February 1942: a vigorous, sinewy man who could always put a few more working hours and a few more miles of comfortable motoring into his day than anybody else. But the pioneer was Lt.-Col. A. J. R. Hill, R.E., who was afterwards killed in action in Burma. Hill was sent to Persia in September 1941 by Brigadier Martin, Chief Engineer in Iraq, to make a reconnaissance. He was a professional soldier with a very clear mind, exceptionally tough physique and ferocious energy. These qualities were not superfluous. On arriving in Tehran he found that his job was not to be merely that of a surveyor and engineer: he had to be a diplomatist, lawyer and commercial negotiator at the same time.

For the whole of the roads question was delicate and involved. There was as yet no treaty between the Allies and Persia, and, since the British Government was particularly anxious to take no unfair advantage of the situation, the original proposal was for the Persian Government itself to put the roads in order, with very large financial aid from the Allies and perhaps some technical assistance. This proposal proved unworkable, mainly because the Persian Government, after the abdication of Reza Shah, was too much occupied in reorganization to undertake such business. As a compromise it was suggested that there should be a tripartite agreement between the British and Persian Governments and the Danish firm of Kampsax who had supervised the building of the Trans-Iranian Railway, and who, with their unrivalled experience of Persian personalities and methods, were to act as consultant engineers to the British. In drafting such an agreement, Hill had the help of Major (afterwards Lt.-Col.) G. W. Kirkland, R.E., a civil engineer who was lent to be his assistant and who was familiar with contracts and finance: the two men, diverse in experience and personality, but equal in determination and perfectly complementary

to each other, met for the first time when they travelled together from Baghdad to Tehran, and in a small hotel in Sultanabad, on the way, they thrashed out the various questions involved as they sat on a window-sill waiting for their baths. The draft, with financial implications amounting to hundreds of thousands of pounds, was produced on Hill's aged typewriter that night, and this agreement, after certain minor revisions by various authorities, went to the Persian Government for approval.

It has occasionally been supposed that dignity requires Government officials to be relatively slow in the execution of business; if that be so, the officials of the eastern world are not less alive to the need for dignity than those of the west. Hill, however, was wasting no time. While negotiations were still in progress he made his first reconnaissance of the western route, accompanied by M. Laerum, the very able chief engineer of Kampsax, two Norwegians, one Russian, one Persian, one Armenian and a Madrassi. On the way he came to a working agreement with Laerum on technical matters, and having reached Sultanabad, on the return journey, he took the train to Tehran, secured a tender from the General Manager of Kampsax, and flew with it to Baghdad. A few days later, after a turmoil of negotiations in which Brigadier Rhodes, Brigadier Martin, and the Engineer-in-Chief from India were all involved on the military side, he was off again on the eastern reconnaissance, this time with Lieut. (afterwards Major) Gaywood, who had already reconnoitred the long and hazardous route from Qum to Bushire, and with eight other vehicles containing a Kampsax engineer, three contractors, drivers, orderlies, native police, food supplies for the whole party, and a cook. Hill himself drove the baggage truck, when the regular driver had ditched it and lost his nerve; he may, in fact, be said to have driven the whole caravan. They covered the 600 miles to Meshed in just over two days and the 650 miles from there to Mirjawa in stretches of 150 miles. The contractors were required to make their calculations as they went along. At Zahidan, on the homeward journey, Hill called for their tenders, considered them in relation to danger, shortage of supplies and other formidable difficulties involved in working so far from the capital, argued certain points, awarded the contracts. Settled! The work was to begin at once. The party drove furiously back to Tehran.

It was in keeping with the odd chances in military life that Hill was just then summoned to give evidence at a court martial in India, which kept him away for more than a month, leaving Kirkland to deal with consultants, contractors, and assorted personalities who just felt that they could do with a little money, to organize further reconnaissances, to unravel the extraordinary complexities of Persian currency law, and—not without a chill in the spine—to sign cheques on a mysterious 'B Account' for sums equivalent to £50,000.

For the work was already under way. The obstinacy of half a dozen Englishmen who had decided that the roads were going to be developed whether anyone helped them or not was communicated in some strange way to the contractors, who, increasing in number and variety, came to represent twenty-three nationalities and to include merchants, doctors, members of the Persian Royal Family, and a jovial Baltic Baron whose recreation was to go after bandits with vigour and unvarying zest. Long before the verbosity in Tehran subsided—the diplomacy, the procrastination, the backstairs haggling over rake-offs—a growing multitude of coolies with their shovels and wheelbarrows were out on the job. The total number was to reach 67,000, with 14,000 donkeys, and by the end of March 1942 they had handled or were handling 40,000 cubic yards of soling and 1,500,000 cubic yards of metalling. Some 6,500,000 cubic yards of earthwork had been laid.

But the problem of supervising this work, as well as making the new reconnaissances which had been ordered, was not a simple one. Broadly, it was the business of Kampsax to see that the contractors were doing the job for which they had been paid; but at a time when expert and reliable supervisors were very hard to find it was impossible for Kampsax to do all the necessary supervision, including technical supervision, themselves, and when work was not keenly supervised it was liable to stop. The humorous and enchanting Persians are often considered to be the best labourers between the Mediterranean and the Indus; but they require a little coaxing. Gangers and foremen often proved very slow to use their natural intelligence; they were obsessed by ideas on roadmaking which were a hundred years out of date; and all alike were infected with the belief (perhaps a greater curse to the life of the East than opium) that as long as everyone gets his rake-off all will be well. The maintenance of completed sections, by men who kept the gravel evenly spread over the surface, had to be carefully watched. Floods washed away long stretches of the work on the eastern routes and the gangs had to be set to do the work all over again. Snow filled the passes which the Foreign Office had said 'must repeat must' be kept open and it was up to the R.E. to see that they were continually cleared. All along the hundreds of miles there were grievances to be settled, problems of pay, food, compensation to which it was assumed that a British officer could always find an answer. To cope with this, and with all the office work in Tehran, Hill's staff of three officers and one sergeant had been increased by one officer. It was not till January that nine more officers arrived.

They drove incessantly, lurching and shuddering over the corrugations, up 9,000 feet into the mountains, out over the notorious Shirgaz desert and the great central Lut where Alexander and Jalal-u-Din had lost the greater part of their armies, sleeping sometimes on the bed of a stream where the car had stuck, sometimes in little chaikhans where

they would wake in the sickly odour of opium fumes. Hill himself covered 18,000 miles in his first six months, and the three cars which he used successively in that time fell to pieces. Gaywood, working on the long and desolate eastern route, did 32,000 miles in the same period. Cars were hard to get, and tyres harder still; they had to be patched in the local fashion with anything that could be found. On the nearer eastern road, where the section between Bushire and Shiraz contains four of the highest passes in Persia (so that even Hill was dumbfounded when he saw it), Captain (afterwards Lt.-Col.) Thompson took over the work which Gaywood had started. This tall, humorous architect and amateur pianist who had been quietly building agreeable residences in England and who, in his own words, had "never stopped to look at a road in my life", found himself responsible for converting some 600 miles of desert road and a further 200 miles of precipitous cart track into a motor highway. Up and down this track, among the wildest in all Asia, he travelled ceaselessly, advising, ordering, exhorting. He found it convenient to be unarmed. Whenever he was ambushed by the Qashgai tribesmen, who in their migratory seasons will commit murder for tea, sugar or clothes, he spoke to them with courtesy and watched with patience while they stole the nicely calculated sum of 'bandit money' which he methodically carried. When he collapsed from sand-fly fever, jaundice, or the overturning of his car he reported to the Church Missionary Society at Shiraz, and Dr. Mess, the great woman surgeon, put him back into working shape. Sometimes, when the coolies were attacked by the Qashgai and robbed of everything except (or including) their drawers, they lost their nerve and deserted. Thompson went after them and persuaded them, with homœopathic doses of largesse, to return to work. Of the coolies he was immensely fond. He could not help liking the bandits as well. But sometimes he found it "just a little tiresome to have no proper means of self-defence".

There was still no proper road-making machinery to be had: it was a business of men, donkeys, and spades. But by the time the R.E. staff increased, and Brigadier French came to organize the military supervision on less break-neck lines, long sections of the roads had changed beyond recognition. On most of the western route the track of less than six months before had become a modern gravel-finished trunk road with an overall width of nearly thirty feet. Where it had crossed unpaved river beds there were now well-made bridges, culverts or Irish crossings. Driving down towards Baghdad, Kirkland could see on the long, straight lengths a line of maintenance labourers extending both ways as far as his eyes could reach, and in one hour thirty-seven great U.K.C.C. lorries passed him, moving smoothly and swiftly northward with their Aid to Russia loads.

Already the enterprise was involving many other service branches besides the Engineers. From the days when Hill had been obliged to

borrow money from the Legation for everything from stationery to motor-cars, the financial aspects had grown extremely complicated and correct book-keeping had been a continuous anxiety. It was a relief when the Financial Adviser in India sent to Persia a chief Auditor who, with the strictest regard to the taxpayers' interests, combined a practical man's understanding of the difficulties in getting things done quickly under conditions very near to economic and financial chaos. His advice to the Engineers was invaluable. The feeding of the labourers presented another very large problem: before the Allied entry huge quantities of grain had been exported to pay for public works and the resulting shortage was aggravated by hoarding, speculation and mismanagement. It fell to the Supplies and Transport Branch to supplement local resources from their own limited stocks until supplies could be specially imported by the U.K.C.C. Again, for convoys and as military routes (for which they might be required) the roads had to be equipped with refuelling points like those which had been established on the long desert road from Palestine. Here the oil companies, which had already undertaken a large programme of piping for military purposes, were again ready to co-operate with Supplies and Transport, and in 1942 the A.I.O.C. performed the formidable task of establishing petrol dumps along the whole route from Zahidan through Isfahan to Sultanabad. There were as yet no means of communication along these roads: in fact, apart from the oil companies' lines and a few town-to-town links consisting of single iron wires, there had been no signal communications in Persia at all. Very soon the Signalmen were extending their base network up to Ahwaz and across from Qizil Ribat, in east Iraq, to Kermanshah. Before the end of 1942 the construction sections had begun to work along the Khanaqin-Kermanshah road on the gigantic task of building a new all-military signal route which would finally link Cairo and Baghdad with Tehran.

In time the route from Bushire ceased to be used for convoys, mainly because its protection was too great a strain on manpower. The further eastern routes linking with the railway from India, which were developed primarily for the emergency movement of troops, were used only intermittently. (In the latter part of the war they served as one means of sending Indian soldiers on well-earned leave.) It was the western route, fed from Khanaqin and from Andimishk and continuing from Takistan to Tabriz, which carried the greater part of the Russian road-haul.

From Khanaqin, 100 miles across the desert north-east from Baghdad, the road undulates for fifty miles over a sunbaked plain broken by nullahs and strewn with stones and scrub. There are cranes and jackals here, and on the road itself a constant traffic of donkeys, covered sometimes with brilliant saddlebags and abominably overloaded with old men and babies, live chickens, and perhaps a pair of lambs. Here, in

summer, the temperature may be above 120°. Mirage is constant; a hamlet appears to be an island in a shimmering lake; and the mountains lying far ahead have a curious unreality. Across the Persian border the road begins to wind into the foothills, searching for some easy passage up on to the plateau, and, failing to find one, turns into the Paitak Pass. Here, in $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, it rises 1,400 feet, twisting and doubling through the extravagantly sculptured rock, clinging sometimes to an almost vertical face of cliff. Reaching the plateau, it goes on through country which is barren except for small valleys with poplar groves, but bordered with mighty hills, hills that change from their distant grey to brilliant orange and violet, red, steel-grey and green, with snow-capped mountains which sunset turns to unearthly shades of crimson and gold. Kermanshah is a little oil-refinery town, and the Army made a camp there which looked like a plaything below the towering cliffs that stood against it. From Kermanshah the road keeps level for thirty or forty miles, close to the steep 4,000-foot rim of a wide, bare plain: nosing the rocks of Bisitun where Darius carved the story of his triumphs, and turning gently to pass by smaller, separate hills like Gothic cathedrals perched upon Sussex downs. It rises again into the Shah (or Asadabad) Pass, in winter snowbound, so steeply pitched between the mountains leaning against it, so giddy and tortuous, that the Paitak Pass seems to have been a trifling experience; and then, from more than twice the height of Snowdon, descends to ancient Ecbatana, the lovely town of Hamadan. There is still another range to be crossed, by the Aveh Pass, the highest of all, before the road arrives at Takistan, and for many miles it winds in a supple, holiday fashion between lower hills with silted lakes and rocks of sulphurous green. But for most of these 130 miles it is straight, and except for the passing wayfarers—donkeys with mountainous loads, peasants in yellow skull-caps, blue trousers and poshteens—almost featureless. The driver, here, is held in a boredom close to that of flying. He sees the mountains perhaps forty miles ahead and they appear to come no nearer. The road with its file of signal poles goes on as far as he can see, unbending and unaltering: it curves at last and then straightens again, featureless as before. He feels curiously that time has stopped and that he is caged for ever in this stony waste, to endure eternally the pain in the small of his back, the rub of the poshteen against his neck, his hands frozen to the wheel and his feet in the gilgit boots like wedges of ice.

From Takistan (or Siahedan, to give it its rightful name), 385 miles from Khanaqin, the road developed by the British goes on to Kazvin. But the convoys turned westward here to face another stretch of 300 miles. The convoy road runs now over open moorland at a level of only 5,000 feet; it is almost as straight and dreary as when it crossed the plateau behind. Here, in harvest time, the roadmen go away to the fields and the road becomes so deeply corrugated that drivers feel

as if their spines will break; throughout the winter heavy rains fall intermittently and in spring there are likely to be sections under flood. From Mianeh, 180 miles along, the road begins to twist again, picking its way through scrubby, lifeless valleys between wind-eroded hills, and rises once more to 6,400 feet through yet another pass, the Shibli, where lorries have to shunt back and forth to get round the hairpin bends, before it descends to the simple, pleasant town of Tabriz. Here, with Khanaqin 700 miles behind, the goods could be put on rails again: the Russian border is at Dzhulfa, only eighty miles away.

This way, in past millennia, the great conquerors came: the armies of Darius and Xerxes, Alexander's mighty pack-trains, wound through the Paitak opening and the fearful passage of Asadabad. And through all the centuries this path had borne a traffic of merchant caravans, of couriers, fugitives and pilgrims. In the first World War there were British soldiers leading their mules along the precipice edge, manhandling Fords through the water crossings and lifting them bodily over fallen boulders, till the extraordinary exertions of Gaskell's Sappers and Pioneers had made the first rough motor-road. And now the route would bear in a single year the weight it had once borne in a hundred; where the donkeys had scrambled over sliding shale great U.K.C.C. lorries reeking with hot lubricant ground incessantly along the gravelled slopes, and men who had trudged this route on foot, men of the several races subject to the Shah-in-Shah, sat impassively in the high driving cabs.

There were other drivers to come. It was thought unfair to give to civilians the task of carrying warlike stores through lonely country where tribesmen hungered after firearms, and for this purpose the Army had to supply a road transport service of its own.

Like most of the major Paiforce tasks it had to start in a hurry and to depend at first upon improvisation. The Army has a drill for convoy-running, but the drill needed adaptation to a route of 700 miles over deserts and high mountain ranges. It was difficult enough, in those days of chronic shortage, when the services were already hard-pressed in maintaining and developing the far-stretched military lines of communication, to find the vehicles and the men: the other requirements—staging camps, workshops, medical aid posts—would not be there till someone had built them. So the earliest columns, which were found from the Indian No. 51, No. 203 and No. 204 General Purposes Transport Companies, had to be self-contained. The crews slept rough: beyond Takistan, where the British zone ended, there were no staging posts at all. When a vehicle broke down altogether, or was wrecked by sliding off the road, another would tow or half-carry it, perhaps for 300 miles. Each column took its doctor with it, and also an ambulance car.

At this early stage the U.K.C.C. gave very generous help to the Army, and as quickly as possible the organization of the route

acquired the methodical shape on which the R.A.S.C. reputation for efficiency greatly depends. The U.K.C.C. were in their turn to benefit from the new developments. A properly staffed Column Headquarters was established at the southern terminal, Khanaqin, and an Advanced Column Headquarters at Takistan. A Traffic Control Company of the Corps of Military Police set up posts on either side of the passes, linked by field telephone with snow-clearance posts at the summit, so that columns could be sent through systematically as soon as the R.E. sections had made a pass practicable for one line of traffic. Staging posts were built by Indian Sappers (or made by the conversion of old buildings), with properly heated sleeping quarters, dining rooms and recreation rooms, and at a later period, when General Selby requested the Russians to make similar posts in the zone for which they were responsible, they did so in three weeks. At all these posts there were medical detachments and ambulances, recovery vehicles, reserves of rations, petrol and oil. Petrol supply points where twenty or more vehicles could refuel simultaneously were established at intervals along the route. A special system of terminal maintenance was evolved to take the place of the Sixteen Daily Maintenance Tasks, an admirable ritual which, though almost sacred to the R.A.S.C., proved impracticable to men who were rushing supplies across half a continent. An Indian Light Aid Detachment was charged with the duty of inspecting all vehicles at the southern terminal; a Mobile Workshops Company of the Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers put out detachments to do 'Second Echelon' repairs along the road; and an L. of C. Recovery Company of the I.E.M.E. worked out a practicable system for rescuing vehicle casualties. Columns continued to carry the bulk of their own rations, but meat, vegetables and fruit were supplied *en route* from Detail Issue Depots. Extra clothing, including sheepskin coats, oilskin jackets, fur-lined gloves and snow-goggles, was issued to every man.

All these developments were designed to relieve the appalling strain on men and vehicles. In the early days, when a vehicle broke down, the Column Commander would have to go back and attend to it, leaving the column in charge of a V.C.O. or havildar, and would get to the night's stopping-place with the one sheep that was lost at perhaps two or three o'clock in the morning: now he could leave that business in other hands. Exhausted and frozen drivers need no longer do an hour's work on their vehicles before they wrapped themselves in their blankets for the night. At the staging posts they found shelter from the bitter winds and a decent bunk to lie in, and many will remember all their lives a British officer at Takistan, Captain Green, to whom each arriving column was a family to be welcomed and he its cheerful servant, lighting the Valor stoves where they were most needed, seeing that every man got his hot bath and a well-cooked meal.

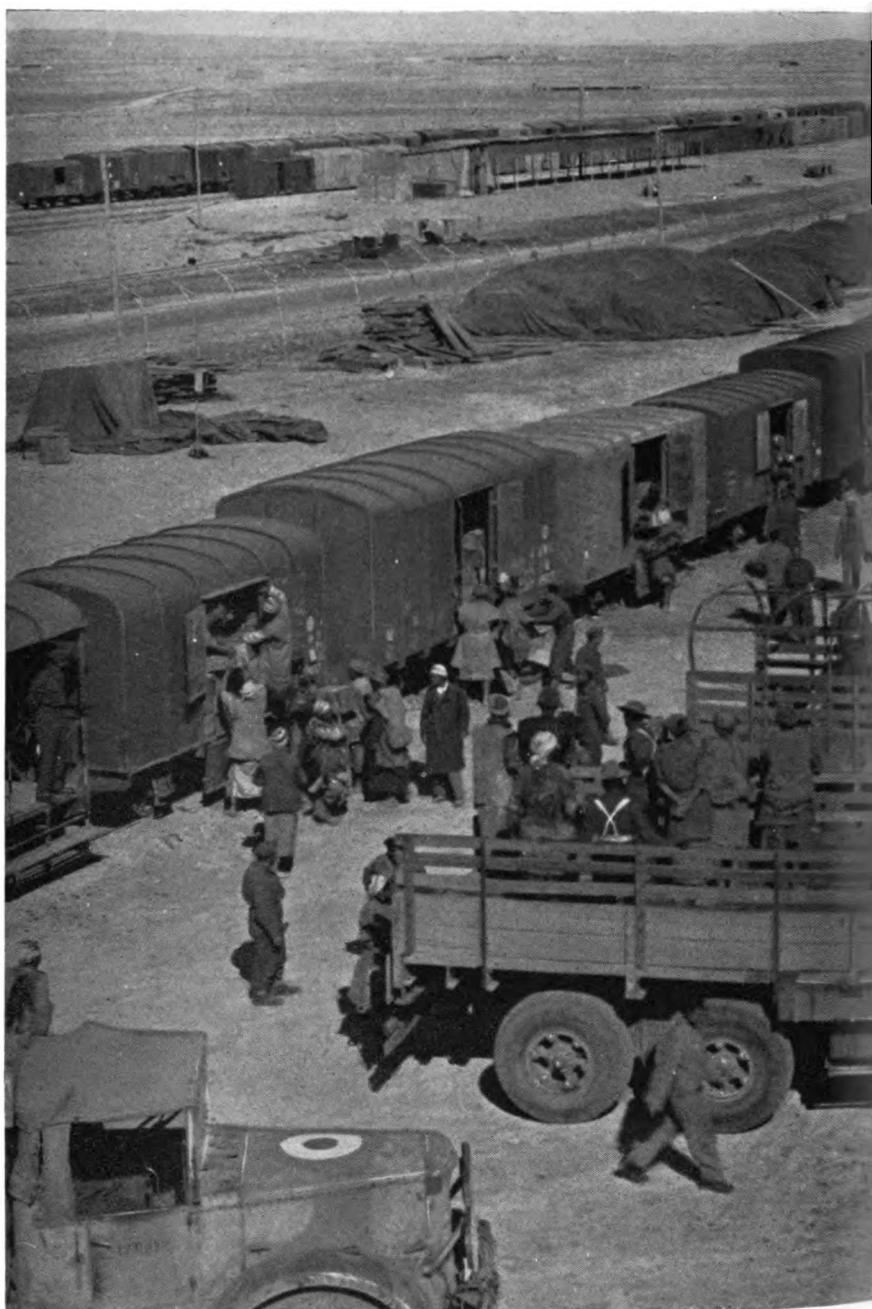
Those better (but still arduous) days could only come slowly. The hardships of the earlier drivers were equal to any that were suffered in Persia and Iraq, and in the shining history of Indian service in the second war there can be few finer examples of sustained endurance. Some of these men were Moslems who, during the days of Ramadan, refused to profit by the indulgence which their Faith gives to travellers and would drive all day without even drinking a cup of water. Some were Madrassi who had never experienced cold weather and whose education in driving had been limited to six hours' instruction in a small vehicle on the left-hand side of an ordinary South Indian road. And now they were driving 5-ton Studebakers and 10-ton Mack Diesels up the ice-paved gradients of the Shah Pass, where, if you miss your gear change, your lorry has only to slip back a few feet and it will topple over and crash down a thousand feet into the gorge below. At any of the hairpin bends by which the road screws round the rock face they might meet other lorries, driven by Persians, whose road sense is often smaller than their technical skill, or by Russians who displayed in their management of cars that Slavonic exuberance which in other contexts makes their race so attractive. Yet the number of accidents was astonishingly small. Up on the plateau violent gales swept sheets of snow into the drivers' faces (many of the vehicles had no windscreens); drivers strained their eyes to see the vehicle ahead, while their own slewed and swung on the carpet of snow. Here the temperature might fall to -10° F. If his engine failed a driver had to fumble for his tools with frozen fingers, get out and set to work with the blizzard thrashing like a wet whip about his body and face, and afterwards drive on hard to where the rest of the column (with engines still running since otherwise they would not start again in the cold) had pulled off the road for the night: some to sleep as best they could and some to stand as sentries. With the violent changes in altitude, temperatures might vary in a few miles' running by as much as 55° , and men who had found bush shirts almost more than they could bear at Khanaqin were sometimes glad of their balaclava helmets at Hamzahabad the same evening. The warmer days of summer brought trials of another kind, for the surfacing of the whole road with bitumen did not start until 1943, and so long as the surface was of gravel the columns moved, with their head-lamps alight, in a heavy cloud of dust. For hours, then, the drivers, wrapped up so that only their eyes were visible, sat with nothing at all to look at except the tail of the vehicle in front, appearing and disappearing through a swirling fog; and often the wind would gather a sheet of sand from the wastes and draw it across the road, tightening the dust-packed darkness till they could see nothing at all.

This sequence of barely tolerable discomfort, interlaced with alternate boredom and fear, continued normally for six days and seven nights, which brought the columns to Tabriz. Here, with luck, there



Photograph by U.S. Army Signal Corps

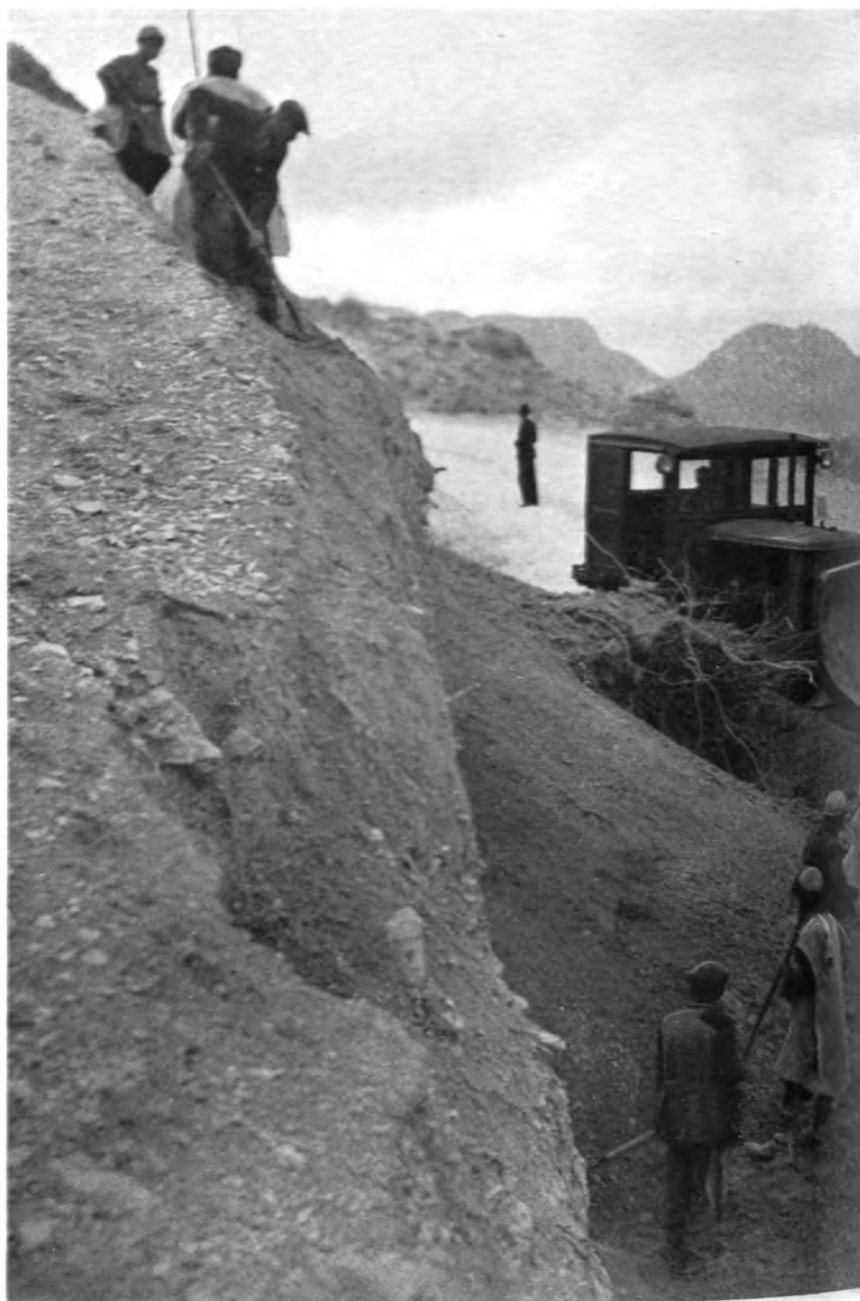
Answering the call from the North. British, American and Russian representatives at a meeting in Tehran of the inter-Allied committee for organizing aid to Russia.



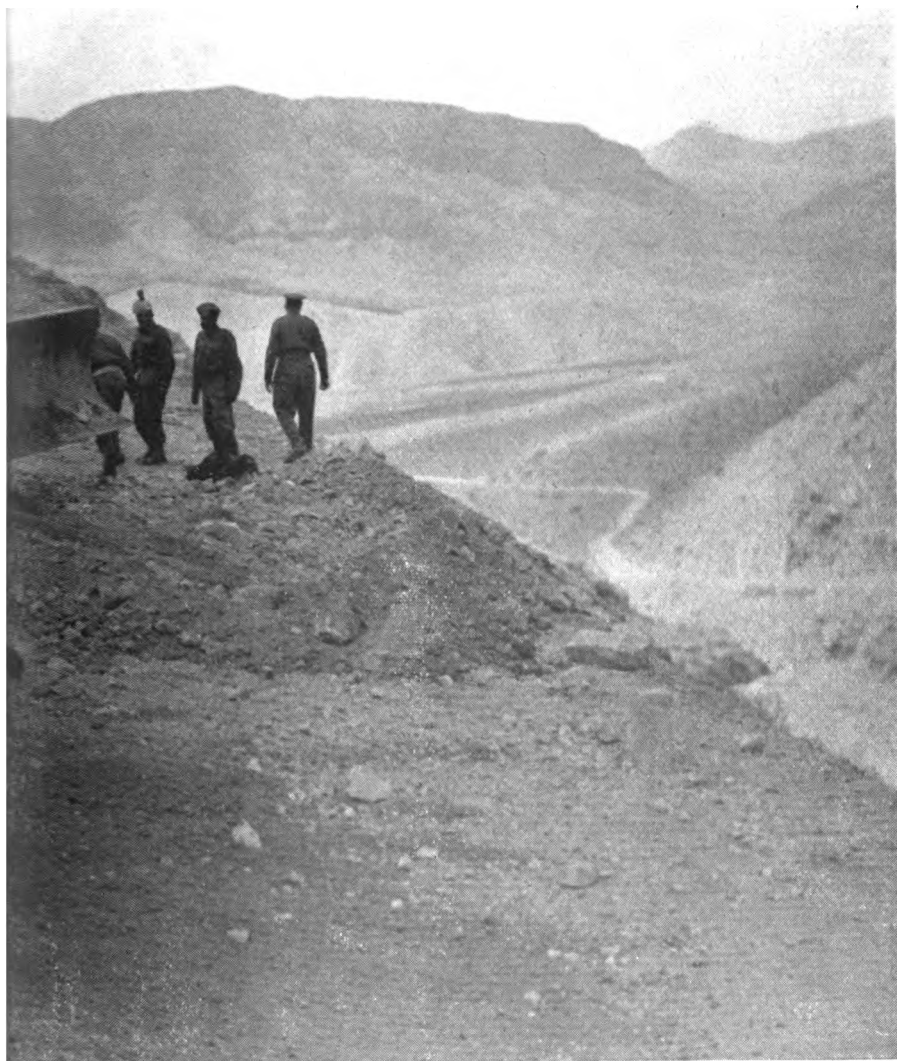
Lorries loading up from the railhead at Khanaqin for the long drive to the north.



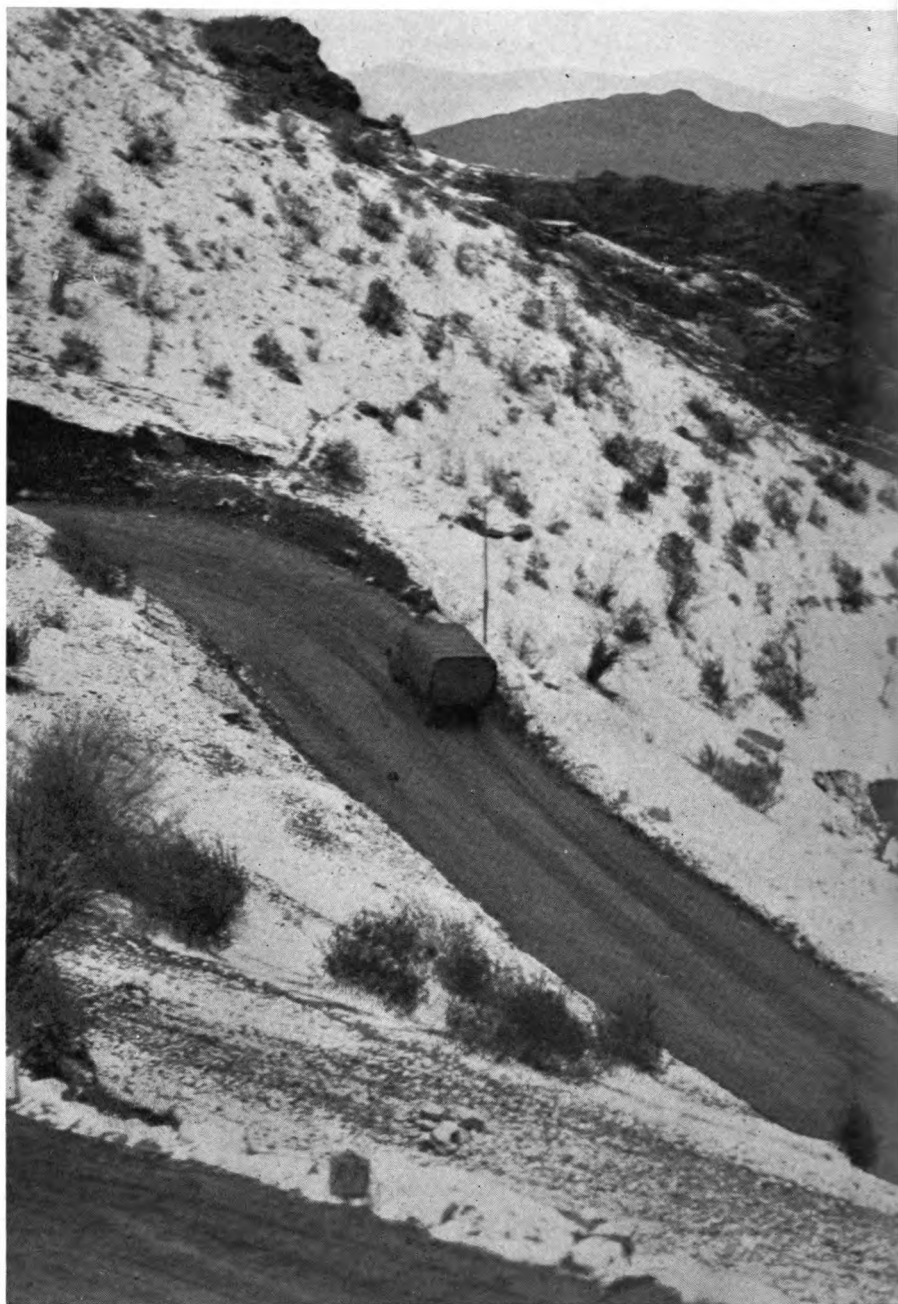
"Paiforce enabled five million tons to go to Russia" could be the epitaph of the Command.



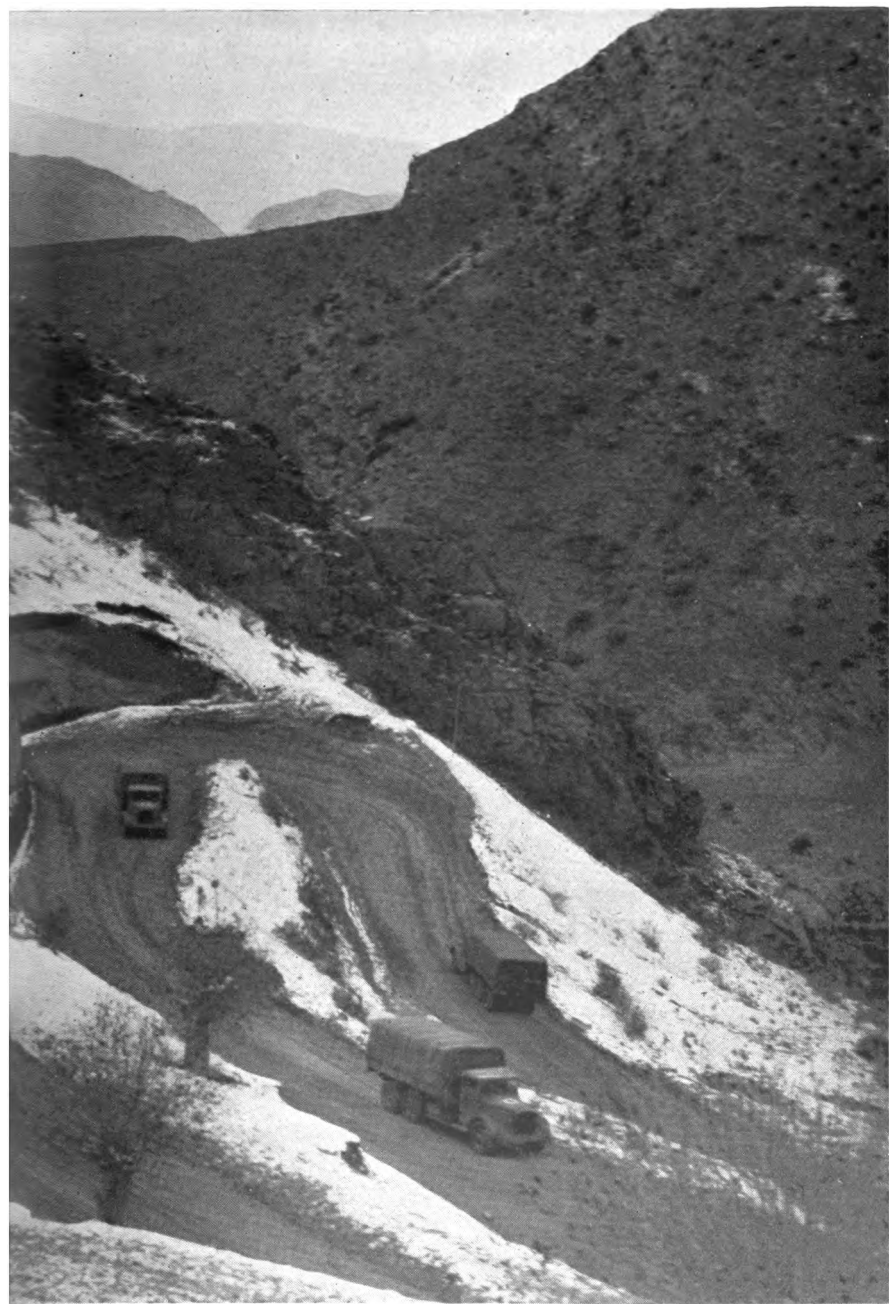
One of the hazards of the Russian journey. Tidying up after a landslide in the Shah Pass,



steeply pitched between the mountains and more than twice the height of Snowdon.



Up into the snow on the great road route to Russia. At one point, twisting and doubling



through the mountains, the road rises fourteen hundred feet in less than four miles.



At a staging-post on the Khanaqin-Tabriz route. Earlier, the drivers on this seven-hundred-mile mountain journey had to sleep in their vehicles or under them.

would be a break of a day and a half, but necessity might reduce it to a mere twelve hours. Tabriz had simple comforts for tired men from the road: a gentle climate, gardens, cafés, a bath-house and good Persian beer; cinemas which showed Russian films and ancient films from Hollywood. There were officers and men here, British and Indian, whose business it was to do everything possible for the crews, and despite the barrier of language the Russian soldiers managed to show their friendliness. But this was not a holiday. The vehicles had to be unloaded, oiled, greased and overhauled. Two nights, or sometimes only one, and the column was on the road again, starting the five-day journey back to Khanaqin. At Khanaqin four days were allowed for the men to recover, to put their vehicles in proper order and get them unloaded: then they were off once more to face the Paitak Pass, the cold monotony of the plateau, the Shah Pass, the Shibli. In the nine months when No. 51 G.P.T. Company (coming from Mysore) were on this work many drivers did the double journey at least sixteen times.

It has been said that some sepoys had only a vague understanding of what the war was about. These drivers, at least, knew exactly what they were doing. Captain Shneerson, in charge of the terminal post at Tabriz, had known them all. "The 10-tonners used to come in like clockwork", he said. "This meant that a driver who had fallen behind, owing to some mechanical trouble, would drive for as much as eighteen hours at a stretch in order to catch up. They knew the Russians had a loading programme and they weren't going to let them down."

This courage did not go unrecognized. Three of them were decorated by the U.S.S.R. with the Order of the Red Star.

A British company came to share in the work. "We get a bit of cold at home", said a wiry Midlander, who came to know the run like the Nottingham-Derby road, "and I reckon we can take what's handed out in Persia. But these Indian blokes, they'd never known anything like it. If I was Joe I'd give the Red Star to the whole blooming lot."

Later, when four nations were sharing the task and the lorries were coming off the assembly lines at a steady pace, the volume hauled by road was to be vastly increased. But by December 1942 the total carried from Khanaqin alone, in seven months, had already exceeded eighteen thousand tons.

CHAPTER XX

THE STORM CLOUDS LIFT

THE title 'Paiforce' has been used in previous chapters as a convenient designation for the army which grew from the brigades landed in Basra in April and May 1941. It was, in fact, a continuous (though chequered) growth; a number of officers and men who took part in the original landings were still in Persia and Iraq in 1944 and even in 1945. But the separate Persia and Iraq Command, for which 'Paiforce' is an abbreviation, was not constituted until September 1942. Previously the force had been known by several names in succession, of which the latest was Tenth Army.

Shortly before the formation of Paiforce it had been found that the general administration of the immense lines of communication behind Tenth Army was a grossly unfair burden to place upon its Commander, who was fully occupied in operational planning, and in August 1942 this general administration was taken over by an Inspector-General of Communications, acting under the ægis of Middle East Command, while an area command known as Pibase was created to deal with internal security and local administration in the Base and Lines of Communication area. From this the logical and now most necessary development was the formation of a separate Command, with Headquarters at Baghdad, which, controlling both Tenth Army and the L. of C., could integrate the activities of both; and thus, finally, a solution was found to the problems of dual control which had been an anxiety to everyone concerned from the time of the first landing.

The command of the new organization was not a post for which any ambitious soldier of high rank would have asked in the summer of 1942. The chances of winning a great reputation here were, on the face of it, small. According to reasonable calculations, the best that the new Commander-in-Chief could hope for would be the opportunity to fight a brave and skilful delaying battle, and, meanwhile, he would be burdened with a complexity of problems that might daunt the most placid of administrators. A commander had to be found who was capable of great speed and resolution in mounting a battle in the worst possible circumstances, but he needed to combine with that flexibility of mind a temperamental fibre which would withstand an incessant bombardment of anxieties. General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, G.C.B., G.B.E., D.S.O., was appointed. General Wilson's physical architecture had been designed on a generous plan: a predominantly Indian Command, associating this great figure with the splendid proportions of the noblest of Indian animals, at once chose an elephant

as its formation sign: and his mental build was not less ample. Men who heard his explosive chuckle experienced a peculiar optimism; it was beyond imagination that the Nazis could seriously interfere with a man like this.

That optimism was needed, for throughout the summer of 1942 the weather of war had been ominously dark. The Russians had been forced to give ground as never before, and it was touch and go whether the Allies could hold the Alamein line or not. By September the position of the Allies was as precarious as England's fate had been on the morrow of Dunkirk. Rommel was within fifty miles of Alexandria and the rich delta of Egypt was almost within his grasp. Stalingrad was invested and German troops were pushing down towards the Caucasus, whence, according to an informed appreciation made in August, they might penetrate to the River Araxes in North Persia by late October. And this was not the only threat with which Paiforce was directly concerned. There had always been the risk of a German advance through Anatolia, which would bring them into the Gulf area through North Iraq—and that possibility remained.

When Wilson took up his appointment the only operational troops he had to meet this grave dual threat were two Indian infantry divisions and one Indian armoured division. The infantry divisions had each only two brigades; they were both below establishment and deficient in artillery, engineers and signals. The armoured division had no medium tanks. Corps artillery units, anti-aircraft artillery and administrative units were either short of requirements or lacking altogether, and despite the gigantic labours of L. of C. Signals the network of signal routes required for operations over so large an area was not yet complete. There was still a chronic shortage of motor transport, and a single company of the Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, designed to maintain 600 vehicles, was actually maintaining 2,000 over 850 miles of road.

But the long-awaited reinforcements were on the way. In August Lieutenant-General Anderson had brought the Headquarters of 3rd Corps, and in September the British 5th Division was starting to arrive, followed by the 7th British Armoured Brigade, which had recent battle experience, and—in November—the 56th (London) Division. By the end of October the new arrivals included the 21st Indian Corps Headquarters, commanded by Lieutenant-General Mayne, the 5th Indian Division, fresh from fighting in the Western Desert, and the 3rd Carpathian Polish Division, also from the Middle East, which, with Polish troops evacuated from Russia, were to form the Polish Army in the East. Tenth Army was thus becoming a real army, controlling three Corps Headquarters, seven infantry divisions, one armoured division, one independent armoured brigade and one independent motor brigade (10th Indian).

The strength of the Command in anti-aircraft artillery was also increased, and enemy squadrons which were tempted by the rich targets that the refineries and the Lines of Communication offered would have met, now, with a violent welcome from the ground as well as from the air. It is a subject of lasting bitterness with thousands of anti-aircraft gunners that no German or Italian aircraft ventured on this experiment. They were not idle, for the installation and the care of anti-aircraft equipment, the maintenance of high standards in training, require a more continuous and more strenuous energy than outsiders have ever understood. But they had no live targets to shoot at. On the gun-sites in Bahrein or Qum they dreamed hungrily even of Salisbury Plain, they thought with almost mordant envy of their colleagues in Middlesex and Kent, and they cursed the Luftwaffe for its supine laziness.

Wilson's task was to get this suddenly expanded army into workmanlike shape and at the same time to locate it strategically. In this, the transport shortage was the main limiting factor, and since Egypt was perpetually hungry for transport for immediate operations the position did not seem likely to improve.

Strategically, the core of the problem—as almost always in contemporary warfare—was the possession of airfields. Between the River Araxes, which forms the Russian border at the north-west of Persia, and the open country between Kazvin, Tehran and Hamadan, there were only two areas in which aircraft could land: these were between Ardebil and Tabriz, and about Lenkoran on the Caspian coast. If the Germans overran these areas they would have convenient bases for the bombing of the Persian oilfields and refineries, which it was Wilson's primary task to defend. (Much as the A.A. gunners would have welcomed that development, it was undesirable in the larger sense.) Further, whichever side held those areas would be able to give fighter cover to its troops. It followed that those areas must be held at all costs. But to send troops there immediately, and to keep them stationed there until the Germans should break through, would (in addition to raising certain political difficulties) impose an impossible strain on the already overstretched lines of communication. Neither could a compromise be reached by holding troops 250 miles or so farther south. Operational troops were, in fact, at that time training in the area of Hamadan and Kermanshah, not far from the northern boundary of the British zone, but as winter came on it would be increasingly difficult to administer them there, with supplies forced over snowbound roads, and life in a temperature which might stay below freezing-point for weeks at a time was likely to impair their fighting efficiency. There was a further objection to keeping troops so far from the base: it meant that transport of all kinds had to be used for supplying them which could otherwise be devoted to the Aid to Russia lift.

The possible threat to North Iraq through Turkey or through North-

West Persia and the Ruwandiz Pass, though at this time more remote, was a further complication. The Iraq Army, in which excellent fighting material had now been greatly developed by new equipment and training, had undertaken to contribute to the defence of this area, where the necessary fortifications had been well developed, and it was considered that the Polish Army in the East, although at an early stage in building, would be able to bear the main burden. None the less, it might be necessary to move British and Indian formations back into North Iraq at short notice.

It was a problem, then, of timing. Wilson and his staff had to ask themselves every day: what is the earliest date at which the Germans may now be expected to reach the Araxes? In what strength? What force will be necessary to stop and destroy them? How long will that force take to get there, from various distances, in fighting order? How will they be maintained there and what curtailment of supplies to Russia will be involved? These were not calculations which could be worked out on a piece of blotting-paper: and the wrong answer might lose the war.

In the event, the astounding prowess of Stalin's armies, dramatically turning the tide of war in Russia, put the possible date for a German invasion of Persia farther and farther back, and Wilson was able to meet the calculated risk by keeping only one division and one motor brigade (under Brigadier F. McCallum) in Persia, located in the Qum and Andimishk areas, where they could be supplied by rail. Even then, it was no easy winter for the troops. At Sultanabad (Arak), where Tenth Army Headquarters moved in November, there were regularly thirty degrees of frost at night and, though huts were found for the men, the officers continued to live in tents. With two feet of snow in the compound, vehicles had to be winched into the workshops, and Punjabi turners working on anti-aircraft equipment actually squatted in the snow. (Yet not one Indian ever allowed himself to go into hospital.) The problems of maintaining a large force in operation in North-West Persia if the Germans should regain the initiative in South Russia were in no way altered: the staff had merely a little more time for solving them.

Major-General C. R. C. Lane, C.B., M.C., as D.Q.M.G. Bases and Lines of Communication, was the officer particularly concerned with these problems. Before the formation of Paiforce, plans had been made for a system of bases in Persia, and work on some of these had started. The more obvious course was to complete the execution of these plans, so that Persia would have, so to speak, its own Shu'aiba with advanced depots drawing from that source. The objection was that the construction would involve a severe strain on engineer resources, already overdriven by work on roads, airfields, hutting, and the vital programme of providing $1\frac{1}{2}$ million square feet of workshop space. Moreover, the

carriage of materials for base construction would again occupy transport at the expense of supplies to Russia. The whole plan was therefore radically overhauled, many projects were modified or cancelled, and it was decided to maintain operations in Persia chiefly from the base depots in Iraq.

This was (as its authors very well knew) a risky decision, and no doubt a vexatious one for those who had already done hard work on the planning of the Persian depots. But successful commanders are men who, having measured risks against advantages, coolly accept them.

And steps were taken to reduce the danger. If operations opened in Persia something like 2,000 tons of war material a day would have to go forward from the Basra area across the Shatt al Arab, and, as things were, every ton would have to be taken over in barges and then loaded on to rail wagons at Tanuma. Materials for a bridge of boats had been ordered from India, but with Indian resources now taxed to the limit it was doubtful whether they would arrive in time and whether such a bridge would, in any case, be sufficient for so immense a weight of traffic. General Wilson therefore ordered the rapid construction of a permanent bridge, to take both road and rail, at a site close to the Basra airport.

So now a problem was presented to the R.E. staff of South Iraq Area, which was directed by Brigadier Gifford Hull, C.B.E., a famous and adventurous engineer whose name was specially associated with irrigation works in China. The puzzle was perhaps the most difficult of all those which the theatre presented to the Engineers, for the bridge had to admit the passage of river traffic, and a rising centre span would require high supporting towers and correspondingly deep foundations, for which neither time nor material was available. The ingenious solution (to the finding of which several picturesque but untrue stories are attached) was to make the centre span go down instead of up, so that vessels would pass above instead of beneath it. Except for the Inglis spars, all the material for the bridge was found in the Base Ordnance Depot at Shu'aiba. Since no experts in pile-driving were available, that work was undertaken by R.E. officers, and the first pile driven, visible to this day at an angle some fifteen degrees from the perpendicular, suggests that the job is one which the wisest of men need a little time to learn. But in eight months the bridge was ready for use.

Meanwhile, L. of C. installations for Persia were (in the current jargon) being prefabricated in Iraq. Advanced workshops for the repair of tanks, guns and vehicles; hospitals and convalescent depots; reinforcement camps: these, with the other installations needed in a theatre where nothing would be found ready made, were prepared at a place between five hundred and a thousand road-rail miles from the

sites for which they were destined, and an elaborate movement plan was worked out by which, on a given day, the greater part of the transport facilities in the Command could be switched over to the task of lifting the material forward. The original estimate (which later calculations proved to be slightly too optimistic) was that this prefabricated L. of C. could be functioning in three weeks from the day when it was launched. Thanks to the continued Russian successes, these plans were never put to the test: it is possible to regret that such daring, skilful, and laborious advanced planning will not take its place in history beside those other masterpieces of British staff work which were brought to fruition.

The date which governed all these plans, the earliest date at which the Germans might be expected in Persia, receded steadily. By November 1942 it was put at April 1943. And in January the Command was able to start releasing the greater part of its field formations to join the pursuit of the enemy in North Africa.

But what the Germans had failed to achieve with their armies they were still trying to accomplish by other means, for the destruction of the Persian oil installations was always their best chance of crippling British power, while the cutting of the Persian railway might decisively hobble that of Russia, and the vastness of Persia made it a perfect playground for the enterprising saboteur. There were, moreover, points of friction in the country from which an industrious mischief-maker could always profit: certain tribes had never needed much encouragement to lawless behaviour; economic maladjustments caused periodical shortages for which the foreigner could always be blamed, and there were men in high places whose personal ambition was in no wise hindered by thoughts of patriotism and responsibility. Mayer and his colleagues, though not of the intellectual calibre of Wassmuss, the great German agent of the previous war, were hardworking, and they lost no chance of exploiting these discontents. "We have close contact with the military circles", Mayer reported to his masters in August 1942. "We also have five wireless transmitting sets given us by the Japanese." It was not enough, then, for Paiforce to devote a considerable strength of troops to the guarding of installations. Armed reconnaissances of dangerous tribal areas had to be made constantly; at times units had to be moved at short notice to exercise a steadying influence where trouble was brewing, and incessant vigilance had to be exercised by Area Liaison Officers and members of the Field Security sections, young men with special qualifications who sometimes sacrificed the chance of a commission in order to carry out this patient, exacting and usually unrewarded work. It was fortunate that Mayer's vanity sometimes made the British task a little easier. The detailed notes which he made, presumably for an autobiography, and which he left behind one day in November 1942 on a hurried exit from Isfahan,

provided Intelligence with a useful *Who's Who* of the German fifth column in Persia.

Historians will judge, perhaps, that Germany lost her war in the winter of 1942-43. At any rate she ceased in that period to run it on her own lines. But it could not be assumed, in Persia or elsewhere, that the tide would not turn again, as it had turned more than once in North Africa. The fighting troops were being whittled down, but they might have to return in a hurry, and it remained a prime responsibility of Paiforce to ensure that if this occurred the machinery for putting and keeping them in the field was in sound order. There remained a great total of work to be done, and skilled labour was still the central problem. Hundreds of Indian Pioneers had been taught army trades, and local civilians had been trained to semi-skilled standards, but the number of skilled tradesmen available remained about 15,000 short of the Army's full requirements.

It was now that America, which had already made so great a contribution in material, came to the help of Paiforce with a far greater contribution still.

The capacity of the Persian railway was growing steadily, but when the Aid to Russia target was suddenly raised from 2,400 to 6,000 tons a day (while a further 6,000 tons were to be carried by road) there was no reserve of British manpower to cope with the expanded task. Mr. Churchill arrived in Tehran to discuss the matter. It was decided to ask America if she would take over the operation of the railway, the ports and the bulk of road haulage in Persia, while Britain continued to be responsible for inland water transport and lighterage, for security and for the road haul through Khanaqin. The British would also complete all developments already planned. To this the Americans agreed: Major-General Donald H. Connolly of the United States Army and his staff arrived towards the end of 1942 and by 1st April 1943 they were ready to take over.

Naturally, the feelings of the British railwaymen included a keen sense of disappointment. The full results of their spade-work were just beginning to show; their planning had been sound, the Diesel-electric locomotives and the new rolling-stock which were going to solve a great part of their problems would shortly arrive; they were getting their tools and they wanted to finish the job. But any such private regrets were lost in the satisfaction of knowing that the work was going to be done on the scale which they themselves had longed for. They were like gardeners who have laboured day after day with children's watering-cans and who, just as the plants are starting to grow, see a neighbour arriving with a hose. For the Americans came lavishly equipped, and in splendid force. There was to be improvisation no longer, no longer rough and ready accommodation, no longer a hunger for essential stores, no longer intolerable hours on the footplate for

locomotive crews. Here was a team with giant resources of men and material in every department, and they were going to do things big.

They proved, on acquaintance, to be men of the right sort. The hand-over was not a simple business, and in the nature of things it could have given scope for jealousy and disgruntlement: it was not easy for men who had wrestled with all the difficulties and hardships of transforming a rudimentary system into a great traffic route to see the cheerful confidence of their successors. But these were fellows they could understand. The Americans were professional railwaymen. They spoke a similar language (though their technical terms were often different) and they shared with the British a taste for treating their own minor misfortunes as funny. Like the British, they were not in the least impressed by strangeness or by size, for they came from a country of vast distances, and the only complaint which a brakesman from Arizona uttered about the deserts of Khuzistan was that they made him feel "kinda cramped". The object of both teams was the same, and men of intelligence engaged on the same project will generally find a way of working together. But their association did not stop at that. They found that they felt at home in each other's clubs, they hunted together for small comforts, the British lent their E.N.S.A. shows and the Americans sent over their concert parties in return. "With the Yanks in Andimishk", a British corporal said, "you got to think it wasn't the last place on earth after all."

In February 1943 General Wilson departed to a new appointment, having seen the Command through the most anxious period of its history and leaving upon it not only the famous badge but a certain indefinable character: a kind of jaunty independence, the impudence of a school-boy who is matched against a heavier boxer and has lasted the middle round. It did not appear an easy task to replace him. But in Lieut.-General Sir Henry R. Pownall, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., who took over in March, Paiforce found one more commander to prove that a soldier who reaches high distinction need not cease to be profoundly human.

And as 1943 grew older the fortunes of Paiforce improved. The winds in the Persian hills were still as bitter, in the desert the sun and the sandstorms were no less cruel. There was as much work for every man, for Persia and Iraq had not ceased to be the geographical centre of the war, the oil wells and the Russian life-line were not less vital or less vulnerable, and there was now the increasingly important task of getting men and material ready to serve in other theatres. But the long period of living hand-to-mouth was coming to an end. They could plan a little ahead now, and solidly, not for the desperate chance of saving the war but for their share in winning it; and their ship would no longer be driven off its course by every wind of war that blew.

CHAPTER XXI

LEGACY

THE last two years of the Command's existence, which virtually finished early in 1946, contained no raw material for what is commonly termed 'history': no alarms, dramatic reversals, climaxes; indeed, it was a main task of Paiforce to see that 'history' of this kind did not occur. They were none the less years of accomplishment: of maintaining the steady flow of goods to Russia under difficulties which by no means disappeared; of keeping the peace, in the letter and the spirit, over a huge part of Asia; of preparing men and materials for the other theatres of war. And, though the period was a dreary one for thousands of soldiers, a detailed record of it would not be dull. A large and fascinating book could be written about the constructional and other work of the Royal Engineers alone, and much of the story would fall within the final period. Likewise, the Royal Corps of Signals brought their great and varied tasks to complete fruition in 1944 and 1945. A book could be written about the formation of the Polish Army in the East, another about the vast and specialized organization needed for the handling of aviation spirit, another on the achievements of the Indian Pioneers. Told at the length they deserve, the stories of the Corps of Military Police, the Postal and Salvage Units, the Royal Army Pay Corps, and many other branches, would each yield a wealth of technical interest and of that far greater interest which lies in the spectacle of human beings—often very tired and homesick human beings—solving with courage and resource the infinite variety of problems which these strange times and countries gave them. Here it is possible to mention only a very few of the activities not previously described which were embodied in the life and work of the Command.

There were many factors which complicated the general problem of supply, and even when the transport system was firmly established these appeared to multiply.

The British Army's requirements for its own maintenance were not small. The nature of its protective task meant that troops had to be widely spread and supplies must travel far to reach them. But these requirements, which could in great measure be handled through the Iraq transport system, tended to decrease as the strength of the Command was reduced, till the time came when the outflow of military stores demanded as much attention as the inflow. Persian civil requirements were a more difficult matter.

Economically Persia received great benefits from the alliance, but the presence of foreign armies, however friendly and well-behaved,

always brings inconvenience and sometimes hardship. Unless there is a stable and highly competent government, inflation is almost bound to occur. Thousands of Persian labourers were earning more money than ever in their lives, but sometimes their families were short of food. It was a moral duty always accepted by the British Army to get these shortages put right.

Civil requirements of oil were another anxiety. The foreign armies were using a great quantity of solid fuel, of which supplies in Persia were always limited. This led to a tenfold increase in the civil consumption of fuel oil, for both domestic and industrial use, which finally reached the figure of 1,000 tons a day. It is not hard to realize that, unless Paiforce had watched and worked continuously to see that the civilian requirements were met, many Persian families would have had no heating in the hard winters.

From 1942 aircraft for Russia were arriving by sea: some cased, some already assembled. They were discharged at Basra, where the R.A.F. first took them in hand, or at Abadan, where the A.I.O.C. unloaded them for delivery to the Douglas Construction Company. When ready, they were taken over by Russian pilots, flown to Tehran, refuelled there and flown on to Russia. Stocks of aviation spirit had therefore to be maintained at Tehran, but this was a comparatively small matter. In 1943 the Russians asked the Americans if they would arrange the supply of aviation spirit up to 10,000 tons a month. The Americans requested Paiforce, who were already dealing with nearly all the other oil requirements, to shoulder this new responsibility. It was a large commitment, and destined to grow much larger still, but Paiforce, owing so much to the Americans, was very glad to undertake it.

At the earliest stage, supplies were taken by barge from Abadan to Kibasi Basin (opposite Basra) and there loaded on to rail, but this could be only a temporary solution: the process was much too slow. The first necessity was to cut out the barge haul, and this could only be done by piping the spirit to some place on the other side of the Karun from Abadan Island. A six-inch pipeline was therefore put in hand. It involved 3,000 feet of river crossing, and since the 1,250 tons of piping required was not immediately available, certain production lines in the oilfields had to be taken up and transported over more than 100 miles of desert, in lorries which would carry only ten tons on sand, to supply the deficiency. But the new line was pushed through very rapidly to Khorramshahr; afterwards it was taken right on to Andimishk (approximately the distance from London to Hull), and finally doubled so as to carry both heavy and lighter oils.

The pipeline did not by itself overcome the shortage of rail tank cars; to supplement it the Engineers built a 'drum container production unit', consisting of three factories. In one of these, nine hundred

36-gallon drums could be produced in an eight-hour shift. In another, two thousand seven hundred and fifty 4-gallon drums were turned out in the same period. The third factory made a small container, adapted without permission from a German design, and known as a jerrican. To fill these, a barrelling plant had been erected capable, at top pressure, of filling 7,000 barrels a day.

The demand continually increased and, at a later stage, still another means was found to increase the flow. The Americans had built a perfect road from Khorramshahr to Andimishk, and the capacity of the Allied truck fleets was now enormous. The Karun, as always, was the obstacle, cutting the source of spirit from the rest of Persia, and the Sappers were told to overcome it. Pontoons were brought from the Ordnance Depot at Basra, and with these a Field Company of Indian Engineers, who had never seen this kind of equipment before, made a bridge 950 feet long (then the longest boat bridge in the world) in exactly four days. In a few weeks the giant lorries were streaming over it head to tail. Where eighty vehicles a day had been ferried over, the bridge would carry a thousand.

In two years half a million tons of spirit went through to Russia. Towards the end of 1944 the monthly spirit lift (excluding the quantity sent forward for British military and for civilian needs) had reached 50,000 tons, which was about a quarter of the total lift of all commodities.

The British Movements Staff never dealt with lions, battleships, or paintings by Rubens, either alone or in conjunction with their American colleagues; these are the only commodities springing immediately to mind which they did not handle. Cranes, tanks and locomotives, live animals and houses, stockings and toothpaste, guns, dynamos, and a complete hospital train: all these necessities of war and life passed at some time through their control, and of the major classes of goods almost every one called for some special method of handling. But in some ways it was men who formed the most difficult cargo of all. Guns do not get thirsty on a long night journey; tanks do not wander off on their own to have a look round the station and miss their trains; drums of petrol do not suffer from homesickness or lengths of piping from heat-stroke. Human beings do all these things.

Human beings formed no small part of the Paiforce traffic; at a single transit camp over 300 people of every nationality passed through every day for seventeen months, and by no means all were soldiers. There were civil servants and comedians; there were religious pilgrims going to the Moslem Holy Cities; there were homeless families and little racial groups to be transported; latterly there were ex-prisoners of war on the last lap of their long, circular journey back to Russia. In all this varied multitude there were many who carried a load of wretchedness in body or spirit, and among them the most heavily burdened with

disease and sickheartedness was a great concourse which came to Persia across the Caspian Sea: Polish soldiers and their families whom the war had driven from their own country and who had been temporarily settled in Turkestan.

In 1942 Russia had lost the most fertile of all her lands. Millions of her people who might have been tilling the fields were at the battle-front or building fortifications or forging the materials of war. When every pound of food and every yard of cloth counted, it was practically impossible for her to go on providing for a large foreign population, and it was agreed that Britain should take over a proportion of the homeless Poles and arrange for the resettlement of the civilians, while the soldiers were trained to make up for Allied losses in the Western Desert.

The Poles were to be shipped from Krasnovodsk, on the eastern coast of the Caspian, to Bandar Pahlevi, a rudimentary seaside resort with a shallow harbour on the Persian shore. It was arranged that the reception and accommodation of the evacuees should be managed largely by a Polish staff, under the direction of a small British staff and with other British Army assistance. The evacuees were to arrive at the rate of 2,500 a week, and small parties were sent to Pahlevi to reconnoitre on that basis. There was, however, an unfortunate hold-up in communications between the Soviet authorities in Tehran and those in Moscow. It was not till the 24th of March that the former were able to tell the British that the first flight of Poles would be arriving on the 27th, with the additional information that the rate of arrival, instead of being 2,500 a week, would be about 6,000 a day. Permission was then given for the staffs to travel. When Lt.-Col. A. Ross, of the Highland Light Infantry, who was to command the British Base Evacuation Staff, arrived on the 25th, he found Pahlevi thickly carpeted with snow and the first transport, carrying 1,387 evacuees, already lying off the harbour.

In the first eight days over 29,000 evacuees arrived.

The ships came without warning, at all hours of the day and night, one carrying as many as five thousand. The cargoes were much mixed. The soldiers, though underfed, were properly clothed in British battle-dress sent into Russia through Archangel, and had British equipment. The civilians wore old overcoats and shapeless trousers, torn shawls and faded gabardines, boots falling to bits, nondescript wrappings of greasy flannel and tattered linen. Forty in every hundred were infested with lice. Some of the women were advanced in pregnancy, and among the children were seventy orphans from three to twelve years old. This variegated multitude, unloaded on to the wharf, spilt over on to the beach and stood there in crowded groups or stopped in the roadway and sat down in the soiled snow, where curious Persian children gathered round them. Many were silent, others voluble. Some, excited by freedom and loaded with typhus, wandered off into the town. A few lay down and died.

It was impossible, in the first days, to make a proper register of these people; impossible even to number them, for they strayed and eddied from the first moment of setting foot ashore. The reception staff could aim at two things only: to supply their immediate needs and to keep in some control the disease which they brought with them.

On the arrival of General Sajak on the 31st March, the very able Colonel Boleslawicz was appointed to take charge of the Polish staff. Meanwhile, others had been acting. A cinema was taken for those most in need of protection, while blankets and tarpaulins were provided for those left overnight on the beach. A scouring of the town brought provisions, including 2,000 lb. of Government flour, and the bakers to turn it into loaves. Disinfestation centres were improvised. Tents arrived which would cover 8,000, and three companies of Polish Sappers got to work on camp construction. There was a 'dirty' camp for new arrivals at one side of the town and a 'clean' camp at the other. These were working by the 28th, three days after Ross's arrival. A small hospital was provided by the Persians which, after some initial help, the Poles ran themselves.

General Sajak paid a second visit on 6th April and emphasized to all concerned that things would only go smoothly if the arrangements made by the British were faithfully followed. Improvements were accelerated. More than 5,000 a day were now being put through the disinfestation centres, and the hospital was coping successfully with a population which had risen to above 200. Meanwhile, evacuation convoys had been organized, taking the soldiers towards Khanaqin, the civilians to Tehran, and by 6th April 19,000 Poles had already been moved. The final convoy left on 25th April, taking with them a few civilians who had emerged at the last moment from unknown retreats in the town. Altogether, nearly 44,000 had gone through.

There had been news already of a possible second evacuation later in the year, but permission was only given for skeleton staffs, British and Polish, to remain behind. Confirmation of this second evacuation came on 10th July and the first transport actually arrived on 10th August, so the staffs had exactly one month to make their preparations.

Five reception camps were constructed along the east beach, stretching—with a special children's camp built later—over a distance of $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles and having a total capacity of 40,000. Separate camps were built for the staffs. By the time the first transport arrived there was shelter ready for 12,000, with cookhouses for 20,000. A special jetty had been allotted for disembarkation, repaired by the Soviet port authority, fitted with floodlighting and equipped with a first-aid post.

The second evacuation was quite a different affair from the first. It was properly organized in advance. The British team was much the same, with Ross again in command. The Polish staff had profited greatly from experience; the actual disembarkation was now controlled

by Polish officers with admirable efficiency and without any assistance at all. The Persian officials were extremely kind and helpful. Above all, the arrival of a Soviet Liaison Officer, Lt.-Col. N. S. Kireyeff, made an immeasurable difference to the British staff. This outstandingly able and charming officer had arrived during the last days of the first evacuation, too late to render much assistance. When he returned for the second evacuation he set himself to understand all the difficulties which the staff was facing and to make them his own. His friendship, besides being a great encouragement to the staff, smoothed all their dealings with other Soviet officials.

There were troubles, none the less, the greatest being the condition in which these new evacuees arrived. Many had been living in torrid heat with very little food, and the overcrowded conditions in which the voyage had been made had not improved their state of health. The sickness rate was about five times that of the first evacuation, the most prevalent complaints being dysentery, malaria, typhoid and deficiency diseases. Thanks to the warm weather there was no typhus. But the need for a great quantity of medical supplies had been foreseen, the hospitals were clean and aseptic, suitable food for cases of malnutrition was always procured. And the evacuees showed a power of physical recuperation which amazed the doctors; their recovery of spirit was not less astounding. Some seemed to pass straight from the deepest depression into gaiety; the most emaciated, after a few days of decent feeding, ceased to be mere vehicles of wretchedness and recovered their individuality. They were human beings again, ready to watch with interest the movement around them, able even to hope.

Towards the end of the period Lieutenant-General Anders, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Forces, came to visit the station. He inspected all the camps and addressed both soldiers and civilians. Then the soldiers and the A.T.S. marched past him: the same men and women who two months before had been living in Turkestan, who had lined the crowded wharf at Krasnovodsk, had known the inside of the transports and stumbled gasping over the endless two miles to the reception camps. They marched, 15,000 of them, in well-ordered lines: some not very powerfully, but erect and proud.

At length the tents were all struck, material collected for return to ordnance, the staffs by degrees dispersed. But it was not, for the Poles, the end of their Odyssey, nor was it the end of British anxieties. Some of the problems of Pahlevi arose again at all the staging camps as the convoys moved southwards, and there are many graves between Pahlevi and Baghdad, and across into Palestine, to show the routes they took.

For the Polish soldiers Pahlevi was really the beginning of their adventure.

There were other Polish soldiers in exile in the Middle East; they

had come through the Balkans, Turkey, and Syria into Palestine, where they had been formed into a Carpathian Independent Brigade Group, and they had already shown their great fighting quality at Tobruk. These were joined with those who had been brought out in the first evacuation to form, in Palestine, the 3rd Carpathian Division, and now this Division was brought across the desert to the Khanaqin area to make, with the new arrivals, the 1st Polish Corps, afterwards renamed the Polish Army in the East. On the face of it, this project seemed to be wildly ambitious. The majority of the men who were to compose this army had suffered extreme privation and it would have appeared no easy task to make them fit for the ordinary life of civilians; few, when they left Pahlavi, looked as if they would get through any army medical board for many months. Yet it was proposed not only to make them into fighting men but to use them as material for a large and self-contained formation, organized on the British plan, with its own staff, its own specialized troops able to handle the whole range of modern weapons, its own sappers and signalmen, its own L. of C. troops. And this was achieved. In exiles the flame of patriotism burns very fiercely, and these soldiers had accounts to settle with the Germans. If they needed inspiration they had it in full measure from Sikorski, and from their own commander, General Anders. No exertion and no hardship was beyond these men. The achievement depended not a little on British aid. A large British military mission was attached to the Poles to keep their staff work running on British lines and to guide and assist their specialist training. Paiforce equipped them, kept them equipped and provided all their supplies: a work which, if measured in the hours which officers and men of every branch gave to it, would yield an impressive total. The Polish Army was, in fact, an integral part of Paiforce, and its building may be reckoned as more than a minor achievement among those which Paiforce claims. But the triumph belongs first of all to the greatness of the Poles themselves, and the glory of their subsequent fighting on the Italian front to them alone.

The story of what happened to the civilians is different. They were widely scattered. Many, after making stage by stage the long journey through the Persian mountains and deserts, sailed to countries of the British Commonwealth which had offered to receive them; some went to Palestine, some stayed in Tehran, and many others in different towns of Persia and Iraq. They became receptionists in officers' clubs, assistants in canteens, hospital nurses, clerks in offices. It will not be said that they were happy. At Kazvin the military and civilian convoys had parted, and women who had lost country, homes and possessions had now said farewell to their men. For these women happiness could only be a dream of the future. But they had food and shelter now, and their bodies grew strong enough to sustain their heroic spirits through the loneliness still to come.

In the six months which ended on 30th September, 1943, the Iraq railway system carried 29,000 soldiers and 4,000 vehicles, in addition to the normal movement of military stores. In the same period Transport Companies of the R.A.S.C. and I.A.S.C. were ferrying troops across the desert by the all-weather through road from Baghdad to Haifa, and every vehicle in these companies was covering 1,500 miles a month. Seven hundred thousand soldiers passed through the transit camp at Baghdad.

These great movements were mostly those of formations and units leaving the Command: fighting troops to join in the advance which would end with the German capitulation in Northern Italy; Indian Pioneers whose energy and skill would help to make that triumph possible; Sappers, Signalmen, men of the R.A.O.C. and R.E.M.E. whose experience of technical work at high pressure would now be used in building up the machinery for the invasion of Europe. Such a dwindling of its manpower might suggest that, while the administration activities of Paiforce continued, the remaining operational troops could now settle down to something like a peace-time routine of duty and training. That was not the case.

In January 1943 six Germans, including a wireless operator, were landed by parachute about 70 miles south of Tehran to join forces with the industrious Franz Mayer. In March, three more were dropped near Mosul, and in July another three were landed in South-West Persia to give aid to Berthold Schultze. These incursions were proof enough that Germany had not ceased to be interested in Persia and Iraq. There were also the continual garrisoning of the oilfields, the guarding of 600 miles of railway and at least 3,000 miles of road, to say nothing of ports, depots, and other installations.

This was not all. Special tasks cropped up. For the Tehran Conference all the frontiers had to be closed—and Persia and Iraq have frontiers with eight other countries. Two battalions were sent to Tehran itself to perform the duties of a special garrison. A little later there was trouble in Kurdistan and a column was sent to indicate that the British would not approve of murder and theft. Such calls as these would alone have kept the field formations from feeling that their active part in the war was over. This was, for them, generally a tedious period, but not an idle one.

On the administrative side two processes were continuing at the same time: those of 'backloading' stores and equipment to other theatres, and of consolidation, by which is meant the kind of work that converts a collection of useful workshops into a smoothly-running factory.

Signals had built a vast network of communications over the deserts and mountains, and they continued to work steadily towards giving a service "as good as the G.P.O. service at home". In September 1942 it was possible to speak by telephone from Baghdad to Kermanshah;

by 1944 a speaker at Tehran could be heard clearly at Cairo, nearly 2,500 miles away. Teleprinter systems were also developed, and a wireless network ensured that all the thieves and saboteurs from Zakho to Zahidan could not isolate a Paiforce station. When it was brought to perfection the Signal Office in Baghdad, with its neatly disposed departments, its twelve-position exchange, its up-to-date internal control system, was in every respect as finished in design and organization as the signal office of any home Command. An R.E. office at any Sub Area Headquarters gave immediately the same impression. And this tidiness, this silent demonstration that the Army had everything under finger-tip control, showed equally in the vast installation at Shu'aiba, which, while Baghdad had become the nerve centre of Paiforce, remained its pumping heart.

For Shu'aiba had grown from a sprawl of stacks and tents into an ordered cantonment. The Base Ordnance Depot, with its eight-mile wired perimeter, had become a town in itself: a place of great parks lined with vehicles, of workshops, warehouses and laundries, of tidy encampments where the Indian soldiers lived, having its own church, its own open-air cinema: a town in which more than 130,000 varieties of British equipment were handled. And in area the Base Ammunition Depot was larger still.

These great depots formed only a section of the Base, which spread over Maqil and Zubair as well as Shu'aiba. The R.E.M.E. Base Workshops, now grown to cover 600,000 square feet, employed 3,300 men at the peak of their performance. There were the Engineer Stores Base Depot, the Indian Petrol Depot, the Indian Base Depot for Medical Stores. And at Rafadiya, a few miles south of Shu'aiba, was the Vehicle Assembly Unit, which put together nearly 16,000 lorries for Russian soldiers to drive away, fully loaded, to the Eastern front. All these depots were connected with the railway system and were centrally supplied with water and electricity.

There had been exceptional engineering brains behind this fantastic industrialization of the desert. The earliest in the line of Chief Engineers was a holder of the Victoria Cross, Brigadier C. G. Martin. Then there was Major-General (afterwards Sir Brian) Taylor, M.G.R.E. of 10th Army, Brigadier Minnis, and Brigadier Ullman, who later became Deputy-Director of Works in 21st Army Group. These men saw the picture large; the final execution of their plans depended upon soldiers skilled in many trades, upon thousands of native workers and, in great measure, upon the Indian Pioneers, without whom it is hard to imagine how Paiforce could have done its work.

In the earliest days there had been no time to think of anything which could be remotely described as comfort. Men merely worked and existed. Indeed, as late as 1943 the men at the Base Ordnance Depot were still living in tents, and the officers until 1944. But huts appeared

as fast as material and labour could be found to build them, and they altered the feel of life. Water and electricity supplies were increased, and by the autumn of 1943 Paiforce had a cold storage system which was adequate for its needs.

All these measures contributed to the health of the Command. It had never been bad, though naturally a great many casualties occurred in the early months when the troops had not been properly acclimatized, were working at exceptionally high pressure, and had practically no protection against the sun. But between 1942 and 1944 the sickness rate from heat-stroke among British soldiers dropped from 89 to 2.3 per thousand, and the death rate from that cause dropped from 17 per ten thousand to nil. This remarkable improvement owed something to a mild summer in 1944, something to automatic acclimatization and the reduced pressure of work, but more to advances in health education and the unlimited exertions of Colonel (afterwards Brigadier) F. M. Lipscomb and his medical staff.

If the needs of soldiers were simple like those of animals (as they were often thought to be at the time of the Peninsular War), Paiforce need not, from the beginning of 1944, have been considered very differently from any other overseas Command. But, though great emergencies can make men work like engines, the most intricate being of all creation does not become less complex by being put in uniform and into groups. In that well-known fact there were the seeds of difficulty, and such difficulty could not be ignored by a nation which was fighting for its belief in the value of individual men.

For a man who had been at Shu'aiba for a year or two life was not exciting. Each morning he woke, already sweating if it was summer, to look through the close mesh of his sand-fly net upon a scene of unparalleled monotony: a row of tents and a hideous water-tank, cables and pipelines leading to the roofs of storehouses, and a salvage dump visible a few miles away; a lorry bumping over the desert, a few sheep browsing, a long train of wagons on the horizon creeping towards Zubair. For the rest, nothing but sand. As the sun strengthened this horizon would start to flicker, the storehouses to float upon a liquid haze. Next day it would be the same, and the same the day after.

There were some, the more fortunate, whose own minds produced the antidote to boredom and loneliness; there were others whose hunger for Ealing Broadway or Argyle Street, for a cottage in the Wolds, could not be cured that way. To these the job was nothing but a term of imprisonment from which only time could rescue them—and time moved at a funeral pace. Often there was an undercurrent of particular anxiety: a wife's last letter had spoken of a child being scared by the bombing, or had complained of loneliness with a note of desperation; it would be weeks, perhaps, before the next letter came, and what could one do?

For this bitter, endemic homesickness, felt in the camps about Tehran and Baghdad as well as in staging posts on the Kazvin road, there were no obvious remedies; but those wide and fundamental activities of the Army which are grouped under the heading 'Welfare' had not been neglected in Paiforce even in the earliest days.

There were certain powerful obstacles, some of which were permanent. Distance, obviously, was one of them. If it is hard to organize the distribution of food and pay to troops spread over an area the size of Western Europe, it is harder still to provide them with amenities: rooms where they can sit in some comfort and read magazines, occasional entertainments. A concert party doing a six-weeks tour would spend a third of its time in travelling. At a place like Khorramshahr it was comparatively easy to centralize amenities; but where, in places which sprawled like Shu'aiba or Musaiyib, could you build a club house which would be of any practical use to more than a fifth of the soldier population? And what about the remote posts, where men needed a dose of cheerfulness more than anywhere else? Again, there was no foundation on which to build. The Army had not, like the R.A.F., maintained stations in Iraq in peace-time, which would have been equipped with playing-fields, canteens and libraries. And there were no officers' wives to help, as they did in Egypt and India.

The British community in Iraq is small, and most of the women were doing secretarial or other work. But, with the leadership of Lady Cornwallis and afterwards Lady Stonehewer-Bird, they did everything that their off-duty time allowed. In Persia the Army had no better friend than Sir Reader Bullard, the British Ambassador, and British civilians at Tehran, Hamadan and Ahwaz were not slow to follow his lead. Elsewhere, the oil companies and the Iraq State Railway generously put their club facilities at the Army's disposal, while organizations such as the Y.M.C.A. and the Church Army used tea vans and small institutes to serve scattered units. The debt of Paiforce to civilians was not a small one.

It was the Army's business, however, to see that the soldiers had something to occupy their thoughts besides the business of keeping cool or warm. The British portion of the forces depended for welfare stores on the Middle East, and Persia and Iraq were by no means the only theatres which Cairo had to consider. Moreover, there was a world shortage of such commodities as games equipment, wireless sets and musical instruments. But through the energy and resourcefulness of Brigadier L. C. T. Graham, C.B., M.C., who was charged with solving the problem, these things began to arrive.

To men stationed in places like Musaiyib or Bandar Shahpur, the thought of the bright lights of Baghdad and Tehran was attractive. In practice, Baghdad had not a very great deal besides the lights to offer to men on soldiers' pay. So, in 1942, a leave camp was opened at

Penjwin in Kurdistan; in 1943, another, which came to be used exclusively for Indians, was constructed at Karind, in the Persian hills, while 1944 saw the opening of 'Paiforce Summer Station' at Beirut, on the Mediterranean shore.

The Sappers were by no means reluctant to build swimming-baths, and in the summer of 1944 they were at work on five new ones, besides improving those built already. They were also building six institutes, each to serve 600 men and to include cinemas, and two other 600-seater cinemas. The institutes were normally ingenious modifications of large Nissen huts, which could be dismantled when they ceased to serve any useful purpose. But in Abadan, where it was likely to be of use to civilians after the war, a more permanent and ambitious structure, which included a very large restaurant, was ready for use early in 1945. Abadan had also a handsome cinema of the Nissen hut type.

These and many other activities were part of a consistent drive. There were in the whole Command only six officers and four other ranks devoted exclusively to welfare, and of the officers two were constantly on tour. But these few succeeded in maintaining a co-ordination of effort, and if any impetus was needed it could always be found in Brigadier Graham himself.

At Shu'aiba the Base Ordnance Depot had its own huge cinema and canteen. But its chief glory was the church of St. Martin in the Sands, whose Service Board showed that it was used by all the Christian denominations. It had started as a tent, but in 1942 the Reverend J. R. Swift, C.F., decided that a tent was not good enough to proclaim the glory of God in this wilderness. He designed a church which would be as nearly as possible like churches that British soldiers knew at home, and gathered a small team of men who, at the end of a gruelling day's work, would eagerly put in another hour or two as builders. He was his own foreman of works and his own principal labourer. The finished church had brick walls, a timbered roof supported on brick pillars, sound wooden furniture and a peal of shell-cases. It came to be called Shu'aiba Cathedral, and perhaps the splendid churches of York or of Rheims had no better claim to such a title.

The Command may be said to have had the centre of its religious life at St. George's Memorial Church in Baghdad, though in Tehran British and Indian soldiers felt no less welcome in the American Evangelical Church. But for many in the most scattered posts there were no opportunities for regular worship. They depended on the visits of chaplains, and these tireless men were the far-drawn threads which gave them their only contact with their churches.

In September 1943 General Pownall was appointed Chief of Staff to Lord Louis Mountbatten, and early in 1944 Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Smith, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., came from the most concentrated of all British Commands—London District—to the most

scattered. Those who served in Paiforce may remember him chiefly as one who, coming when the Command felt stale and tired, gave it a new kind of self-consciousness, making it feel that without its work the war could not be won.

His constant journeys were one means to this end. There were several others. The policy was to bring every sort of grouse and question into the open, and for this purpose every unit was invited to send an other rank representative to a parliament in Baghdad. If some men did not get the answers they hoped for, they knew that their questions had not been dodged. And the idea spread about that, when things were out of gear at 'the back of beyond', there were human beings at G.H.Q. who knew about it and were trying to put it right.

For quite a number of British soldiers the most important person in the Command was an elderly Englishwoman who was usually to be found in an office in a side-street of Baghdad. She could best have been described as a professional, unpaid listener. When a man's home worries became such that he couldn't eat or sleep, his remedy, if he chose, was to go to Baghdad and see Mrs. Cotching, the Army paying his fare. Sometimes she would put up a case for you for compassionate leave; sometimes she would get you a trustworthy account of the situation at home. But mainly she listened; then she would talk a little, and often you walked out of her office seeing your problem in a slightly different light, and found that you could sleep again.

No amount of 'Welfare' will ever compensate the majority of Britons for exile. But for these men the sense of being forgotten had lightened, the war's tide was flowing strongly in the right direction, and they knew that they had helped not a little to make it go that way.

* * *

The transport of material to Russia came to an end in 1945. A good epitaph for the Command might be:

"Paiforce enabled five million tons to go to Russia".

But Paiforce gave other services, some much harder to assess and even to define. They could be summarized, perhaps, as the building of true respect and friendship. Many little things occurred which, if they were added together, might prove to be not without significance. One story must suffice.

The village of Hit, on the road between Ramadi and Haditha, was a source of trouble in the early days. It was said to nourish more thieves than any other place in Iraq, and the inhabitants did not hold with foreigners. Early in 1945 a detachment consisting of an N.C.O. and three others was installed in the village, not for police duties but for line maintenance. They did their work quietly and unarmed, they

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showed the usual good manners towards local people. On the day of victory in Europe the detachment heard the noise of drums, reed pipes and hand-clapping, and all the schoolchildren of the village, wearing vests and shorts with enormous V's displayed on their bosoms, surged into the billet in full song, while others decorated the doorway with Iraqi flags and palm fronds. A Union Jack was demanded for hanging in the market-place, and when the soldiers showed some anxiety the Mayor sent six armed men to mount guard over the flag all the time it was displayed. In the festivities which followed and which went on for most of two days, the soldiers were given the best seats among the local notabilities, were almost suffocated with food and drink, almost blinded by the smiles. Those four Englishmen will not forget the Hittites. Will the Hittites forget them?

Paiforce was not hand-picked and it did not consist of a team of archangels. There were tares among the wheat. But if there was also virtue, as the brief sketch of Paiforce activities in this book may have suggested, it was surely virtue of no trumpery kind. Among all the races and types which made up the war-time population of Persia and Iraq there is one figure which stands a little apart: not in hostility or shyness, by no means from lack of friendship, but from a certain quality which makes him older than the rest, whatever his actual age may be. He is nothing out of the ordinary, as he himself will tell you with sincerity; it is just by chance that he has a flair for learning new techniques and getting over difficulties. There he stands, near the entrance to the marshalling yards at Khanaqin, calling up the lorries with a jerk of his thumb: his shirt and shorts limp with sweat, his topee pushed back, his arms grubby from a casual job on a Persian driver's engine; unvarying in humour and fabulous in patience; untiring, incorruptible, and in the end invincible: the British soldier.

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